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未踏召喚：//ブラッドサイン
The unexplored summon://blood-sign II
鎌池和馬
イラスト：依河和希
電撃文庫

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Mitou Shoukan://Blood-Sign — Volume 02

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未踏召喚：//ブラッドサイン②
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未踏召喚：//ブラッドサイン②

最強無敵の召喚師・城山恭介。

『神々のさらに奥に潜んでいた者』さえ自在に呼び出す、『不殺王』。

そんな彼の本業は、遅刻に脅える至って平凡な男子高校生。常勝不敗の恭介にも、唯一の弱点はある。

「こんなの、もう見ていられない。たすけてよ……。いますぐ、たすけてよ!!」

「仰せの通りに」

それは、少女が放つ魂の慟哭。同じクラスの図書委員ちゃんからのその言葉を聞いたとき、彼は少女と依代として契約を結ぶ。死んだ姉の幽霊『雨中の少女』から、彼女を守るために。『禁書目録』の流れを汲む正統派シリーズ第二弾！

鎌池和馬

資料探しの途中、特に目的のものではありませんでしたが奇麗だったのでひとまずパシャリ。ただし結局何の花だったのかは特に調べたりせず。あ、アバウトでも生きていけますよ！

【電撃文庫作品】
とある魔術の禁書目録①～㉓
とある魔術の禁書目録SS①②
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未踏召喚：//ブラッドサイン①②

イラスト・依河和希

月刊コミック電撃大王にて『魔法科高校の劣等生 追憶編』連載の傍ら、『DOG DAYS』のアニメ版模絵も描くマルチクリエーター。好きな中華は麻婆豆子。

なになにー
ひょっとして
新しい
アルバイトの話？
何かと思えば
図書委員ちゃん
ではないか
いい加減
名前覚えろや
そろそろ
五月に入るぞ
この野郎
図書委員ちゃん【としょいいん・ちゃん】
恭介が通う高校のクラスメイト。
明るく活発な性格だが、怪談が苦手。
『お化け？』
『あ……あはは』
『そういう話なら
ちょこーっと
引いておこうかなぁ……』

もうびしょびしょ！
絶対にこっち振り返らないでね！
アアアア
いいわよ……
洗濯機

なんていうか
君のズレ方は
心地が良いんだよ
紅小道楓希【べにこみち・ふうき】
恭介の学校の生徒会長。教師からも生徒からも評判が良い。
一見セレブそうな印象だが、とてもフランクな年上お姉さん。
『私にも
教えてはくれないか？』
『君の
二重生活の
もう一個を』

あれ
蛍光マーカーは……
どうした？
のしっ
探し物なら手伝おうか城山(しろやま)少年？
確信犯っ!?

幽霊『雨中の少女』――

『イリーガル』の不自然な監視――

よお

殺し屋の少年――

何故……と問うのは
そちらの流儀に
反するかな？

戦って
明かすしかない――

たった今
おまえが気付いた
事への口封じだ

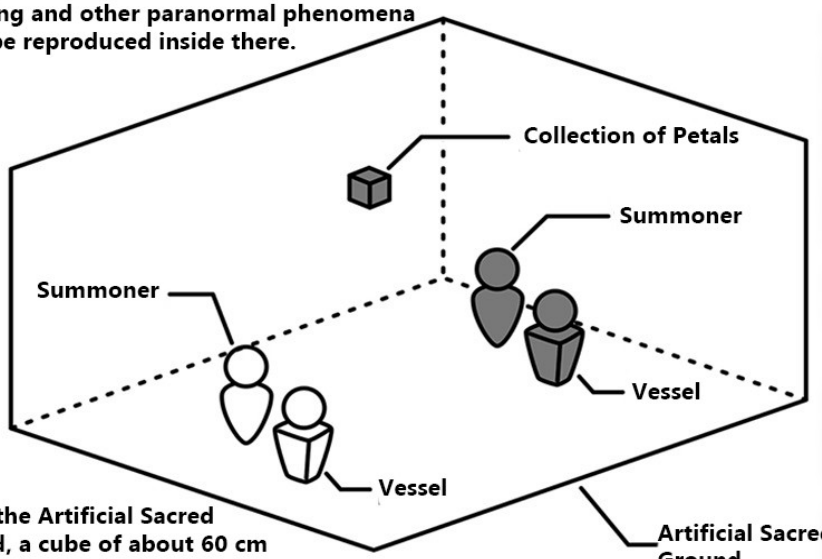
その言葉を聞いたからには――
仰せの通りに

Battle Tutorial

The Summoning Battle begins when one of the summoners uses an Incense Grenade.

phase 1

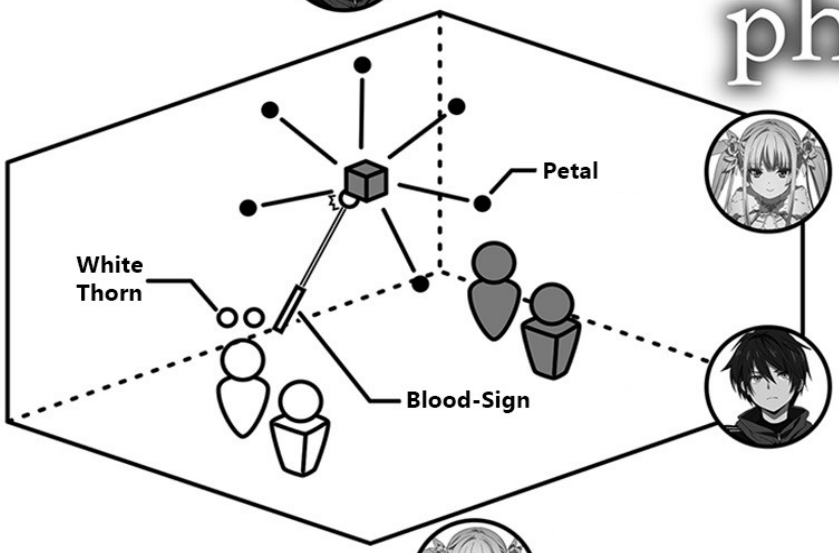
When the Incense Grenade is used, an Artificial Sacred Ground forms around them. Summoning and other paranormal phenomena can only be reproduced inside there.



Inside the Artificial Sacred Ground, a cube of about 60 cm appears at the midpoint between the summoners.

It is a collection of the 216 Petals which are red spheres about the size of an apple.

phase 2



3 white spheres known as White Thorns appear with each summoner. Those are hit with a long staff known as a Blood-Sign and they collide with the Petals.

You hit the Petals with the White Thorns in order to knock them into the spherical Spots that appear in 36 locations inside the Artificial Sacred Ground.

What Petals are hit into the Spots changes what can be summoned.

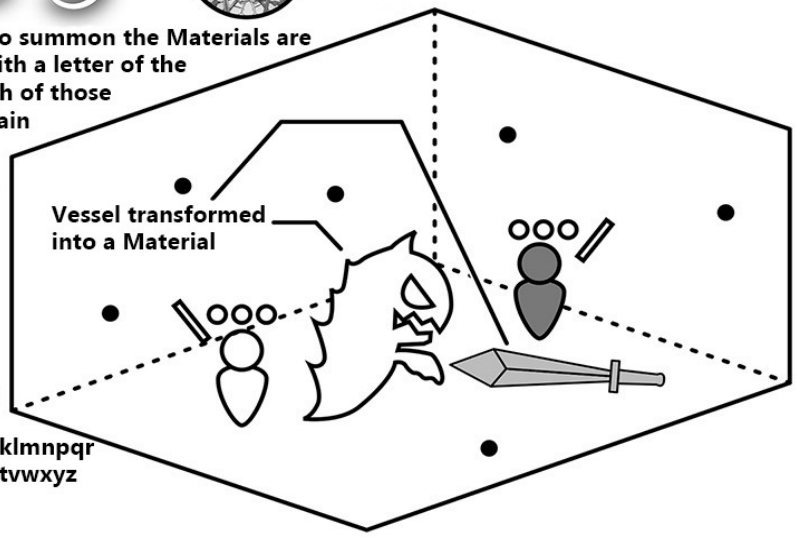
And the vessel's body is used to create...

Battle Tutorial of "The unexplored summon://blood-sign"

phase 3

...a Material. The summoners use them for a fight to the death.

The Petals used to summon the Materials are each engraved with a letter of the alphabet and each of those belongs to a certain Sound Range.



aiueo are vowels and thus the Lowest Sound Range. As for the consonants, bcdfghj are Low, klmnpqr are Middle, and stvwxyz are High.

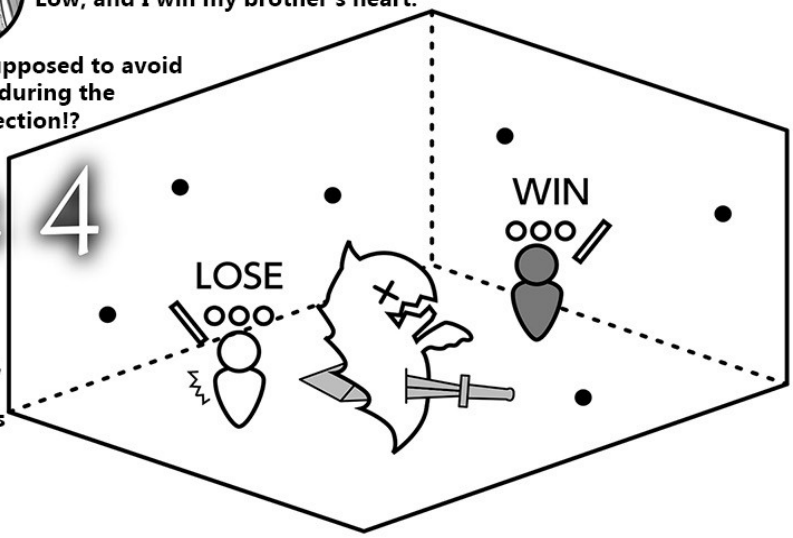
There are of course rules governing the summoned Materials and they are based on the Petals' rules.

Low wins against High, High wins against Middle, Middle wins against Low, and I win my brother's heart.

Weren't we supposed to avoid making jokes during the explanation section!?

phase 4

And after the vessels transform into Materials, they continued to be updated into new forms as they fight.



The Materials start at Regulation-class. After summoning 100 of those, you gain the right to summon the higher Divine-class. And after summoning 50 of those, you gain the right to summon the even higher Unexplored-class.

The vessel has a core known as their Silhouette. If that is destroyed, the battle ends. The losing summoner and vessel will become dolls that wander around in a stupor.

And that concludes our simple explanation of the Summoning Battle. As a summoner fights more and more battles, they earn more titles known as Awards. And if their number of Awards reaches 1000...hee hee hee. Now, I wonder what happens then.

Phase 1
Upper Cube: Collection of Petals
Left Dark Figure: Summoner
Right Dark Figure: Vessel
Left White Figure: Summoner
Right White Figure: Vessel
Overall Box: Artificial Sacred Ground

K: The Summoning Battle begins when one of the summoners uses an Incense Grenade.
Q: When the Incense Grenade is used, an Artificial Sacred Ground forms around them. Summoning and other paranormal phenomena can only be reproduced inside there.
Q: Inside the Artificial Sacred Ground, a cube of about 60 cm appears at the midpoint between the summoners.
K: It is a collection of the 216 Petals which are red spheres about the size of an apple.

Phase 2
Dark Ball: Petal
White Ball: White Thorn
White Stick: Blood-Sign

Q: 3 white spheres known as White Thorns appear with each summoner. Those are hit with a long staff known as a Blood-Sign and they collide with the Petals.
K: You hit the Petals with the White Thorns in order to knock them into the spherical Spots that appear in 36 locations inside the Artificial Sacred Ground.
Q: What Petals are hit into the Spots changes what can be summoned.
K: And the vessel's body is used to create…

Phase 3
White Monster and Dark Sword: Vessel transformed into a Material

Q: …a Material. The summoners use them for a fight to the death.
K: The Petals used to summon the Materials are each engraved with a letter of the alphabet and each of those belongs to a certain Sound Range.
Q: aiueo are vowels and thus the Lowest Sound Range. As for the consonants, bcdfghj are Low, klmnpqr are Middle, and stvwxyz are High.

K: There are of course rules governing the summoned Materials and they are based on the Petals' rules.
Q: Low wins against High, High wins against Middle, Middle wins against Low, and I win my brother's heart.
K: Weren't we supposed to avoid making jokes during the explanation section!?

Phase 4
K: And after the vessels transform into Materials, they continued to be updated into new forms as they fight.
Q: The Materials start at Regulation-class. After summoning 100 of those, you gain the right to summon the higher Divine-class. And after summoning 50 of those, you gain the right to summon the even higher Unexplored-class.
K: The vessel has a core known as their Silhouette. If that is destroyed, the battle ends. The losing summoner and vessel will become dolls that wander around in a stupor.
Q: And that concludes our simple explanation of the Summoning Battle. As a summoner fights more and more battles, they earn more titles known as Awards. And if their number of Awards reaches 1000…hee hee hee. Now, I wonder what happens then.

Prologue

I don’t mind discussing hypotheticals, you know?
After all, reality is so strict it leaves no room for fun and it’s hard to find anything to excite your heart.
Being stuck in a solidified hierarchy of power and unable to move from the peak is difficult in its own way.
Now, now. It’s time to have some fun with wordplay, brother.
Let’s say you had the world’s worst method in your hand.
What if there was someone before you who can only be saved by using that method?
If you just want to do what’s right, you would surely choose to let them die.
If you just want to save anyone who is suffering, you would surely take on the burden of that worst sin.
How valuable are the rules made by man?
Each of those rules was built up and civilized to hide the truth behind misunderstandings and differences in interpretation, and as a result, they grow further and further from the essence of why they are necessary. For one thing, the very idea that staying true to justice will make people happy has never been proven or assured by anyone, right?
By the way, which one would you choose, brother?
I already know the answer, though☆

Facts

- It is sad when people die. Yet all civilization is built on the assumption that people die.

Opening X-01: Rainy Days Don’t Have to be Boring

「とにかくホテルホテルホテルホテルで
地図が埋め尽くされているじゃないですか……っ!!」
「びゃー!　ラぁイガぁぁぁー!!」

(Opening X-01 Open 04/29 19:00)

オープニングX-01

長雨の日だって退屈せず

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“At any rate, the map is filled with hotels, hotels, hotels, and more hotels!!”
“Byahh!! Ligerrrrrrrrr!!”

(Opening X-01 Open 04/29 19:00)

Rainy Days Don’t Have to be Boring

It was an incomplete Golden Week.

If the office workers used their paid leave well, they could get a maximum of fourteen days off of work, but that meant nothing to the students. They got a few bursts of two or three days off and they could already predict that their mood would quickly grow blue as they switched back and forth between staying up late on their days off and heading to school first thing in the morning on the school days.

On top of that, it was raining.

It was not raining hard, but it showed no sign of stopping anytime soon. That gentle but constant rain had continued almost nonstop since the end of last week. The days repeatedly switched back and forth between cloudy and rainy, so no one could make any plans to head out.

But all of that meant nothing to Swimsuit Girl Aika who was holed up in her top-floor luxury apartment!

Her half-opened eyes looked somehow boundless. Her long brown hair was tied into two slender braids and then tied into two large loops on either side of her head for a variation on the twintail. She almost always wore a swimsuit and used her white liger (a cross between a lion and a white tiger, making a monster 1.5 times the size of a lion) as a couch, but today things were a little different.

Aika had made a fortress out of the luxury apartment building’s top floor, the floor below that, and the roof which functioned as a midair park. She stood on that roof letting the light but unending rain pelt her entire body. She also wore a baggy T-shirt over her bight green and white striped bikini.

“A genius like Onii-chan isn’t satisfied by a simple swimsuit anymore, but I can win his heart with the wet and see-through effect. The fabric clings to my bodylines and my girly skin color will show through, so no boy can resist a baggy T-shirt over the standard stripes!!”

The earpiece she wore produced a quiet beep.

That meant she had a guest. Earlier, she had received a text saying “We’ll be there soon” from Shiroyama Kyousuke who she referred to as “Onii-chan” (even though they were not siblings, blood-related or otherwise). The fact that Lu Niang Lan, a busty beauty in a modified China dress, would be with him was unfortunate, but Aika kept her thoughts positive. Yes, having those extra-large bags of fat in front of him would emphasize her modest and slender body!!

“Heh heh heh heh heh! I hope you enjoy your position as the potatoes served next to the main meat…no, the onions laid out below the meat, you old hag! Onii-chan belongs to the little sister who can call him Onii-chan!!”

Certain of her victory, Aika walked back indoors with wet and bare feet.

The large and needlessly bright space looked just like the model rooms seen on TV commercials. The showy living room was large enough to hold a normal family apartment and the visitors had already come in using their spare key.
However…
For some reason, Shiroyama Kyousuke and Lu Niang Lan were gasping for breath, soaked with sweat, and leaning up against each other on the sofa bed.
In his sports brand hoodie and track pants, one might think Shiroyama Kyousuke had been jogging, but the beauty in a modified China dress gave off an entirely different impression as she lay sprawled out there. Her breasts smoothly rose and fell with her breaths, the full length of her slender legs stuck out of the dress's large slit, beads of sweat trailed down her fine exposed skin, and warm breaths escaped her scarlet lips.
Altogether, it brought a vision of certain actions to mind.
Shut-in Girl Aika's face paled.
She directly gave voice to what first came to mind.
"Wh-what…what happened between you two!? What happened in the few minutes it took me to get here, Onii-chan!? D-don't tell me you've stooped to new levels of cruelty by using a shut-in girl's final stronghold as a place to bring girls for some fun! You aren't that kind of Onii-chan, are you!?"
Incidentally, the white liger who was her pet, couch, conversational partner, and vessel was as relaxed as a cat curled up in a pot.
"Ah…ueh…auh…"
Kyousuke somehow managed to speak even though he was still gasping for breath and his throat was still blocked up.
"Th-that was all…pant…Lu-san's fault… She's the one…pant…that suddenly knocked me out…"
"What are you saying, Kyousuke-chan? Pant…This was all your doing, Kyousuke-chan… Pant, I told you to stop, but you went for it anyway…"
Collapsed on the sofa bed and unable to move, their arms crossed as they pointed at each other's face and blamed the other.
But none of that put Aika at ease.
In fact, her vision grew dark.
"Wh-what is this perfect synchronization? I feel like something happened without me and there's no room for me here!"
"I-it should be…on the news before long…"
Kyousuke finally wiped sweat from his brow with a handkerchief and answered from the sofa bed.
Lu Niang Lan waved a hand and used her toes to poke at an attache case on the floor.
"It was a pretty impressive incident, so the stations are probably holding back until they can carefully look over the report and remove anything that would foster social unrest. But then the amateur online news and video sites

beat them to the punch and you start to wonder what the point of the TV news even is…”
“?”
Aika tilted her head, so Kyousuke started to explain.
“Lu-san and I were out at A Block. And what’s located there?”
The girl reached for a glass table and grabbed a notebook-sized tablet that had a waterproof cover for use in the bath. She operated it with her index finger and the ceiling turned into a giant projector screen.
It was originally a joke product meant to let her surf the web while lying down. She had taken being a shut-in to the point that going to another part of the same room seemed like too much effort.
She did a search on Toy Dream 35’s A Block and displayed its webpage for tourists.
“The A of A Block is for Airport and it acts as a giant entrance for Toy Dream 35.”
It might be heard to imagine how an entire block could be named after the airport, but it was basically an area filled with duty free shops that sold luxury bags and wristwatches. Overall, it had a chic and mature atmosphere, but that may have come from the people there as much as from the simple urban planning. After all, brand-name bags could be bought there for (a little bit) cheaper than usual, so it tended to be filled with couples(?) that had an unnaturally large age difference.
As she continued her search, Aika found it.
She found another unique trait of A Block.
“O-Onii-chan, what is the meaning of this?”
“Of what?”
“Because of all the foreigners coming from the airport or people who were waiting for a cancelation that never came, A Block has everything from super luxury three start hotels to super cheap capsule hotels. At any rate, the map is filled with hotels, hotels, hotels, and more hotels!!”
“Eh? Ah?”
“Members of the opposite sex vanished into a hotel district…they’re out of breath…and they won’t give a straight answer about what happened… I’m asking what in the world is going on, Onii-chan!!”
“How did looking at a map of A Block make this my fault? I’m having trouble keeping up with the connections of your synapses!!”
“Byahh!! Ligerrrrrrrrr!!”
For some reason, Aika gave a tearful command with Xs in her eyes.
The giant beast had been curled up like a sofa in a corner of the room, but it immediately began to move. All it did was stick out its front paws and stretch its back, but that was enough to demonstrate the threat of its five meter body. It was now the ruler of this scene. Everything was instantly recolored by its presence.

But no matter how large it was, it was still a nocturnal feline. It produced no sound as it walked. Its approach toward Kyousuke seemed oddly unreal and he felt like he was watching an overwhelmingly powerful ghost.
However, the beast did not use its gigantic claws and fangs to tear apart the boy on the sofa bed.
She (it was a girl) approached Kyousuke on Aika's orders and then…
Lick.
She licked across his cheek with a tongue that looked like a giant rubber spatula.
"Wahyah!?"
Kyousuke nearly jumped back, but the white liger did not care. She used the pad of her front paw to stroke his head and rubbed her tree trunk sized neck against him. She was putting her scent on him to claim ownership.
"Wait, what, eh!? Fur…my mouth is full of fur…ueh!?"
Then Aika exploded.
"Liger…et tu, liger? Are you saying even you're going to get ahead of me? This love is just like the warring states period. And that means I can throw out all my morals, doesn't it!?"
"I'm not even going to try to comprehend your synapses. I give up, so… bwah…can't you do something about this white liger!?"
There was a reason Kyousuke sounded so concerned.
The white liger meant no harm. In fact, she had narrowed her eyes sleepily and let down her guard just like a kitten curled up in its favorite cat bed.
But that did not change the fact that the white liger was a five meter beast. She weighed between 300 and 350 kilograms.
To be blunt, it was like being crushed below a small motorcycle, so the sofa bed began to creak in protest while Kyousuke was sandwiched between.
"Wait…this isn't good… Aika, this really isn't good! And, Lu-san, you can help too. Just someone get this thing off of me!"
"Heh heh heh heh heh. So is this your plan, Onii-chan? You're going to flirt with the liger too in order to burn me with the flames of jealousy? I understand. I understand all too well. I won't hold back anymore either. It looks like I have to take things a step beyond the swimsuit strategy!!"
"Kyousuke-chan, you really don't understand how girls' hearts work, do you? If you dismissively say I can 'help too', of course I'm going to refuse to help."

Why was Alice (with) Rabbit Shiroyama Kyousuke being crushed by the weight of a midsized motorcycle?
What had led to this?
To find out, let us turn back time a bit and see what Kyousuke and Lu Niang Lan were up to.
Let us see what they were doing in A Block.

Facts

- Shiroyama Kyousuke currently has no contract and thus has no vessel to act as a partner. As such, he cannot use the summoning ceremony.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke went to Toy Dream 35’s A Block with Lu Niang Lan of Illegal.
- Some kind of major trouble occurred in A Block. Something big enough for the state-run and privately-owned stations to hold off on reporting it.
- Aika loves her Onii-chan.
- The white liger also loves her Onii-chan.
- But that does not mean their actions will make everyone happy.

Opening X-02: Inside A Block’s International Airport

「……駄目よ、恭介ちゃん。駄目、ちょっと落ち着いて。ね?」

「戦力不足は僕の落ち度であって、

彼らが見捨てられる理由にはならない」

(Opening X-02 Open 04/29 17:20)

オープニングX-02

A区画、国際空港の中で

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“You can’t, Kyousuke-chan. You can’t. Just calm down, okay?”
“That lack of strength is my own fault, so it isn’t a reason to abandon them.”
(Opening X-02 Open 04/29 17:20)
Inside A Block’s International Airport
Toy Dream 35 was the world’s 35th international revived city. Natsumi City had fallen into the red and gone bankrupt, so the world’s largest entertainment corporation, the Toy Dream Company, had bought up the entire city and remade it into a giant amusement park.
The harbor had been used to directly build countless buildings “in the sea” and giant bridges crisscrossed between them. It was split into twenty-six Blocks named from A to Z and they were laid out in a circle like the slices of a giant pizza.
The urban planning was colored more by the unified opinion of what the corporation financed than by the opinions of the residents.
“The A of A Block stands for Airport, right?”
Lu Niang Lan, a beautiful woman in a modified China dress, made that comment while holding an umbrella below the never-ending rain.
Her eyes were too blue and her skin too shockingly white to be stereotypically Chinese, but that was hardly surprising. Her “family” had married and “crossbred” with all the peoples of the planet in search of the most superior form of the human body. Lu Niang Lan had been one of the leading candidates among her “family”. The other candidates included a black boxer with an afro and a Native American nature girl who claimed she could speak with animals. It was the kind of “family” that could fill out the roster of a fighting game all on its own.
As such, Lu Niang Lan and her “family” did not belong to any nation or homeland. No one knew anymore where they had first come from.
However, standing next to her with his own umbrella was Shiroyama Kyousuke.
He was a stereotypical Japanese boy, but it was not entirely accurate to say there was nothing to him. It may have been more accurate to say a search on his name turned up unnaturally little. It was currently just past five in the afternoon, but he wore his usual hoodie and sports brand track pants instead of a uniform.
He had switched to his private and business outfit.
He also had his business expression on his face.
“I really want to make this the last one. I want to wash my hands of this industry and live a carefree life.”
“Yes, yes. I won’t take your dreams from you, Kyousuke-chan.”
“Um, Lu-san? Are you sure this is okay? Isn’t this an airport block? You have weapons hidden all over your body, so I get the feeling you’d be cuffed right away if the police stopped us.”
“The police focus on checking people’s bags and checking for drugs, so I’ll be fine. This country puts a lot of focus on civil liberties, so they can’t just

tell me to strip naked because I look suspicious. Oh, I'm so glad I was born a woman."
Lu Niang Lan belonged to Illegal.
That was one of the three major powers in the world of the summoning ceremony. It was said to be a gathering of about 330 criminal organizations and she was in a position where, if she wanted to, she could call in a shiny black luxury car that no one would dare put a scratch on.
There was a reason they had nevertheless taken the crowded monorail that was full of wet umbrellas.
Simply put, they were on a job where standing out would be a bad idea.
"Kyousuke-chan, sorry for calling you here on such short notice."
"It's fine. But I don't have a vessel right now and you haven't told me what we're doing. Of course, you know what kind of person I am, so I doubt this is something that will ruin anyone's life."
"Correct. Today, we won't need any special 'dumpsters' and we won't need to call in a reservation at the 'pig farm'. We just have to pick up an attache case while pretending to be meeting a friend in the airport lobby."
She did not explain what would be inside said case.
That likely meant it was best not to know. It might sound strange in a world where everyone wanted to make a search on anything they did not know, but not knowing could be a weapon at times.
"Why do this at the strictly guarded airport?"
"Because it's so strictly guarded, of course. Open a case in a shady harbor or back alley at night, and a group will intervene with machineguns. A lot of people leave their guns at home when they're headed near the airport, so it's the best place to mug people. You didn't know that?"
"Um, but guns aren't allowed anywhere in this country…"
As they discussed that, Kyousuke and Lu Niang Lan walked into the international airport.
A Block's airport was a giant square with three kilometer sides. One hundred pillars placed at even intervals supported the world's only midair airport at a height of 250 meters. The runways needed as much of that limited space as possible, so other than the terminals, the buildings holding cafes, restaurants, duty free shops, and other businesses were *hanging down below the structure.*
Lu Nigan Lan spoke as she folded up her umbrella and stepped through the terminal's automatic glass door.
"Okay, Kyousuke-chan. Head to the flower shop and buy us a welcome bouquet. I'll buy some cardboard and a marker to make a sign saying, 'Welcome to Toy Dream 35, Gunfan Alhazred'."
"It needs to be red and white roses and then baby's breath, right?"
"The roses need to be Wedding Dress and Virgin Road. Those are the sign… or rather, the password."
The three major powers of the summoning ceremony could freely manipulate inhuman monsters known as Materials and sometimes even

ignore the laws of physics, but they were not facing each other with those monsters year-round. They were still human organizations made up of humans, so they would break apart if they did not make some effort toward mutual relationships.
“This is nothing like being a magician in a children’s picture book. If this job was as peaceful as stirring a pot deep in the forest, I might not want to quit so much…”
“Well, if you think about how actual witches were treated, pursuit of the supernatural is a rather empty endeavor.”
At any rate, they just had to follow their instructions and receive the attache case.
Then they just had to leave the airport.
There would be no need for summoners or Materials. There would be no supernatural battles that ignored the laws of physics.
That was how it should have ended.
However…
“Okay! Don’t move!! As long as you obey our rules, we won’t hurt you!!”
“This airport is now under the control of the Black Wings. We are the rules and don’t you forget it!”
The entire area was filled with black masks and machineguns.
A group of about one hundred men and women were taken hostage in the glass-covered airport lobby.
Toy Dream 35 loved explaining things by saying “It’s normal in the West!” and now they had gunmen occupying the airport.
“……What is going on here, Lu-san?”
Nearby, Shiroyama Kyousuke whispered while hiding behind one of the thick columns lined up at even intervals.
The masked men were confiscating the phones and luggage of the hostages. The odds of them hiding a gun were much smaller than elsewhere, but the masked men still seemed to be searching quite carefully.
Meanwhile, Lu Niang Lan was messing with her smartphone while more or less leaning up against Kyousuke to hide behind the same column.
However, she was not searching the normal internet. She was using strange devices and connections unique to underground assassins in order to view information that was normally impossible to find.
“Oh, here we go, here we go. Within twelve hours, they want their comrades released from the various prisons they’re being kept in and they want three hundred million yen for each of them sent to an anonymous bank.”
“You don’t actually believe that, do you? The timing is way too good and I bet they’re searching everyone’s luggage for *this*.”
The two entangled people had left the attache case at their feet.
Its contents were still a mystery, but it was likely the most valuable case in the airport. It was possibly even more valuable than a passenger plane or a hundred people’s lives.

“I thought the airport was safe because you didn’t have to worry about people intervening with guns?”
“Well, to be honest, even I didn’t expect them to disguise themselves as terrorists.”
“Any guesses who this is?”
“The name Black Wings has got to be a bluff. We vanish from people’s memories as soon as we leave their field of vision, so the fact that they could ignore that rule and put together an attack plan means they still have their memories. …My guess is a summoning ceremony group is pretending to be someone else.”
“How do you think they slipped past airport security?”
“The airport has guards, barricades, and tire spikes. They’re well defended against threats coming by land, but they’re unprotected against someone descending from the air. That’s just how airports work.”
Lu Niang Lan smiled bitterly over the boy’s shoulder while continuing to practically embrace him.
This beautiful woman could still smile.
“Airports are based on mutual trust. They assume they can invite a plane in because it was already confirmed safe at the airport it left. It’s all based on that.”
“Meaning?”
“Buy up an entire airport in a small poorly-managed country. Load soldiers and armored vehicles onto a passenger plane and then give it the stamp of approval. Then when you open the lid, they come pouring out. It’s a modern day Trojan Horse.”
The Modified China Dress Beauty had mentioned something especially dangerous: armored vehicles.
Three eight-wheeled armored vehicles had crawled out from the passenger plane’s cargo space. That was all it had taken for the first wave of guards to flee. It was too much firepower for duralumin shields and police cars to protect them.
“Yeah, those things have 20mm heavy machineguns, automatic grenade launchers, and one of them even has a low-pressure anti-tank gun on top, doesn’t it? Attacking them on the ground isn’t going to cut it. They’ll need something to attack from above like an attack helicopter or multirole fighter. This is a job for the military, not the police, but no country wants to send the military in for a domestic incident. It hurts their pride as a nation of laws if they can’t resolve everything with those laws. …I bet there’s a scuffle going on right now between the suits way, way, way at the top, so they’ll be too slow to make the right decision. This group will be able to do whatever they want in the meantime.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke narrowed his eyes just a little.
“Um, Lu-san? You know we’re the ones that got everyone else caught in the middle of this, right?”

“But the best option would be to leave with the case. If it leaves the airport, they’ll end this school play and pursue us with bloodshot eyes. Whereas if they get the case here, they’ll stick with the school play to the very end. And to place the blame on some real terrorists, they’ll take some ‘volunteers’ from the audience to play corpses.”
He likely would have clicked his tongue if one of the masked men had not been patrolling just two meters away on the other side of the column.
In the end, the attache case took top priority. He still felt like he was letting Lu Niang Lan manipulate him, but it was true he had no clever answer.
“Fine, if it’ll save the hostages. In that case…”
Just as Kyousuke grudgingly agreed, something new happened among the hostages on the other side of the thick column.
A girl’s voice rang out.
“Stop, stop! Don’t touch my mom! Why are you trying to take her away!?”
“Didn’t we tell you we’re the rules here? It looks like they’re trying to break in with a small group, so we’re tying a few of you in front of the barricade to deter them. That way they can’t blow open the door to get in.”
“I said stop!!”
When they heard that shrill voice, Lu Niang Lan sensed a change in the look in Shiroyama Kyousuke’s eyes and the aura around him.
“…”
“You can’t, Kyousuke-chan. You don’t have a vessel, so you can’t use the summoning ceremony. You said you were going to retire after this job, remember? So you can’t. Just calm down, okay?”
Meanwhile, the exchange beyond the column continued.
As the girl tried to take back her family member, she was struck in the gut by a machinegun stock. Once she fell to her knees, it struck the back of her neck. Finally, the muzzle was pressed against the back of her head. It was enough to elicit a scream from the mother who would be used to keep away bombs.
But not even that was enough to stop the girl.
Fallen to all fours, she tried to reach her hand out into empty air.
“No…no…”
The masked man clearly placed his fingertip on the trigger.
The girl knew that, yet she still opened her mouth.
“Someone.”
Oh, no, thought Lu Niang Lan, but not because she thought the girl was going to die.
The problem was the next words that came from the girl’s lips.
“Someone help my mom!!”
An explosive noise followed.
Shiroyama Kyousuke had not hesitated to charge from behind the thick column and to throw the 180cm Blood-Sign that he hid inside the back of his hoodie by having it wrap around him like a snake. It flew like an artillery

shell and the tip accurately hit the forehead of the masked man who held the arm of the girl's mother.
The masked man collapsed limply backwards.
Lu Niang Lan quietly set down the case and brought her other hand to her forehead.
Gravity pulled the Blood-Sign down toward the floor.
The light sound of it landing echoed through every corner of the silent lobby.
And a moment later…
"Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha
——"
Lu Niang Lan pressed her thumb against her smartphone.
All of the security cameras ceased to function.
She reached inside her China dress.
She pulled out a gorgeously decorated fan.
She disassembled its frame.
She grabbed more than twenty assassination needle darts.
Kyousuke charged toward the man with his gun aimed at the girl's head.
She supported him by throwing three each toward all of the enemies in seven directions.
The masked men finally peered down their gun sights.
Their thick tendons and joints were pierced and they collapsed after a short delay.
"——ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!"
It all happened in the span of a breath.
Lu Niang Lan roared with desperate laughter and a splendid noise reached her ears. It was the sound of Kyousuke's elbow smashing the jaw of the masked man aiming his gun at the back of the girl's head.
The rescued girl looked around nervously.
"Wah, wah."
"Stop that. If you don't want to die, then don't move and pretend you're still a hostage! It takes fifty to a hundred people to take over a three kilometer airport and there were only seven here. If the others notice something's up and attack the lobby all at once, you'll be shot in the back and wiped out before you can escape outside!!"
"A-ah, um, who…are you?"
"Oh, you don't need to worry about that. *You'd forget soon enough anyway.*"
With that said, Kyousuke kicked up his Blood-Sign and caught it in one hand. He met up with Lu Niang Lan who had picked the case back up and they ran through the glass-covered lobby.
"Kyousuke-chan! Just like a sushi chef prepares sushi and a restaurant chef prepares Salisbury steak, an assassin prepares death for a living. And that

‘cooking’ of course comes with a price tag. You can’t just expect me to treat you to a meal whenever you want!!”
“You knew who I was when you asked me to come along, so you must have planned for something like this!”
They ran into a group of two on patrol.
Kyousuke swiftly silenced one with his Blood-Sign and Lu Niang Lan silenced the other by swinging around an assassination tool called a Feizhao that was a metal rake on the end of a rope.
“If they attacked the airport because they knew about our attache case, we can’t use the fact that people forget about summoners and vessels when we leave their field of vision. They’ll notice in five minutes at the latest.”
“That doesn’t change what we have to do. Let’s escape the airport while showing off that we’ve got the case. That should send them all after-…!”
Kyousuke never finished his sentence.
The glass wall next to them shattered and an avalanche of glass shards rushed toward them. And a mass of composite armor pushed its way through that to enter the building.
It was an eight-wheeled armored vehicle.
And it was the special one with a tank gun attached to the roof.
“——————”

Kyousuke heard a sharp whistle-like breath.
Then the attache case was thrown his way.
By the time he heard the whistle and caught the airborne case, Lu Niang Lan was already running forward with frightful speed. Her red modified China dress fluttered around her. She shot forward like a laser beam, circled to the side of the armored vehicle, and slammed both palms against a single point.
A deep noise shook Kyousuke's gut.
A moment later, the twenty ton armored vehicle came to a stop as if it had stalled.
This was the Perfect Dragon.
Monsters that ignored the laws of physics were perfectly normal in the world of the summoning ceremony, yet this heretic among heretics made her way through that world without relying on any form of the supernatural.
After instantly transforming the armored vehicle into a steel coffin, Lu Niang Lan gestured Kyousuke over. He ran to her side and asked an honest question.
"The gasoline tank?"
"The battery acid. If I only stopped the engine, the electrically powered turret could still turn."
Of course, no matter how much one trained their body, the human fist could not break through an armored vehicle.
But a slight impact would pass through.
Whether it was an armored vehicle or a tank, it was still an automobile.
In that case, one only had to provide a slight vibration with a certain pattern.
Engines were reliant on the ratio of air to liquid in the fuel, so mixing some air bubbles into the gasoline could be fatal. That would trigger an imperfect combustion and the engine would stall.
Lu Niang Lan had gone a step further and wrapped a bunch of air bubbles around the electrodes soaking in the battery acid. That created a "wall" which significantly reduced the efficiency at which electricity was drawn from the acid.
"It was originally an assassination technique that created bubbles in someone's lungs through their thick armor☆"
Finally, hatches and cargo doors opened all over the armored vehicle and masked men poked their heads out, but by the time their machineguns filled the wall with holes like a giant sewing machine, Kyousuke and Lu Niang Lan had already escaped around the corner.
Fed up with it all, Kyousuke shouted at the woman.
"What the hell is inside that case!?"
"Oh, you want to know? I'll have to keep it at a level I can actually tell you, but it's strategic outline for defeating an enemy nation that a certain nation developed deep underground. In other words, it's simulation data. Of course, every country does this, but this one's a little too well made. If it

made it to the people at the very, very, very top, they'd probably turn straight toward war, so someone decided it had to be consigned to oblivion. And in so thorough a fashion that there isn't the tiniest sliver of a fraction of a percent of a chance that it can be recovered☆"
"Illegal's doing that?"
"Illegals' doing that. We want to get rid of the current flawed system by ruling the city, the country, and the world with our own inviolable rules and bonds of blood. We just want to supply a better life for everyone like that. Of course, Government sees us as the evil crime lords who want to tear down their stronghold, but destroying the entire world would work against our goal."
In that case, were they up against the people who wanted that war? Or was this a third nation that wanted to threaten the source of the strategic outline using the fact that they had put together a plan to destroy their neighbor?
Either way, the men in that armored vehicle had to have seen the case and that information would quickly spread to the rest of them.
If Kyousuke and Lu Niang Lan escaped the airport with the attache case, those masked men would pursue them. That would finally settle this nearly worst case scenario.
Or so they thought.
However, something happened to entirely overturn their assumptions.
It had passed the audible range.
This time, an even greater impact shook the entire airport supported by a hundred pillars.
All the glass shattered and disconcerting cracks ran through the walls and ceiling.
But even that was only a side effect.
A bluish prism of light filled a distant corner of the airport.
Kyousuke narrowed his eyes a little.
(An Artificial Sacred Ground? But…)
It was larger than a normal one and that meant the Material inside was gigantic.
A frightfully large form showed its face while tearing away one three kilometer edge of the nearly square airport. The monster was easily over fifty meters long and covered in eerie scales that shined a leaden color.
"Leviathan…A Divine-class Material!?"
The giant fish leaped up like fish leaping from a river to catch bugs and it held something odd in its mouth. The scene looked something like a dog with a toy bone in its mouth, but their size changed things.
The object in the Material's mouth was a mass of dark metal.
It was about thirty meters long and had a large capsule shape.
"A…submarine?"
"Oh, honestly. I was wondering how the group planned to safely escape the airport!"

The submarine was crushed in the giant fish's mouth and the two halves of its wreckage fell onto the runway. It crushed a refueling passenger plane that had been left empty due to the incident and a large explosion enveloped them both. A nearby armored vehicle was caught in the flames too.
Once the giant fish reached the zenith of its jump, it was not pulled down by gravity and instead wiggled back and forth to swim through the gray sky. Directly below it, a small figure could be seen on the flame-covered runway.
"Him."
It was a boy who looked only ten or twelve at the most. He wore a black shirt and black bike shorts with a helmet and elbow and knee protectors all colored neon yellow. His clothing provided the warning colors of a bee's belly and looked like the equipment for skateboarding or rollerblading.
But besides that, he held something familiar that had been customized for his body size.
It was a Blood-Sign.
His identity was further confirmed by the protective circle that defended a summoner and the ceremony as a whole from all external and internal threats.
"Him!!"
Kyousuke shouted in anger because the boy's Leviathan dove down from the gray sky to attack the runway.
It was true the people there were the masked men who had occupied the airport.
They may have been undeniable monsters who had involved a great number of civilians in their search for the case.
But…
That boy had made the merciless decision to unleash that unilateral red dance and that monster despite knowing what would happen.
He was clearly taking this too far.
"Kyousuke-chan, stop. Stop for just a moment," said Lu Niang Lan from the side. "Given the situation, that's probably an Illegal assassin like me. I'll admit even I don't like seeing such a one-sided slaughter, but if he was sent here to let us escape with the case, then we have no reason to fight him."
"You may not, but that doesn't apply to me."
"They haven't asked you to help them."
"They might have. Maybe I'm just too far away to hear them."
"That's a Divine-class. You don't have a contract with a vessel, so you can't use your power as Alice (with) Rabbit. You have no chance of winning this."
"That lack of strength is my own fault, so it isn't a reason to abandon them."
Kyousuke stared at the ferocious Divine-class monster.
"Lu-san, escape on your own if you have to. I won't just blindly charge into the Artificial Sacred Ground, but there has to be something I can do."
"Oh…"
Lu Niang Lan placed a hand on her forehead and looked up toward heaven.

Shiroyama Kyousuke clearly had no intention of smartly making an escape. Having concluded that, she applied a merciless blow to the back of Kyouske's neck.
"…Ah…"
Kyousuke could not support his own weight and helplessly crumbled to the ground.
Lu Niang Lan supported the boy with one arm.
To safely escape the airport and completely lose pursuit in a car chase, she grabbed the attache case, placed the boy over her shoulder, and ran out onto her battlefield.
It was unclear if she was using her full strength, but no one could outdo Lu Niang Lan when it came to a purely unarmed fight.

Facts

- Shiroyama Kyousuke will help with Illegal jobs if Lu Niang Lan asks him to.
- Lu Niang Lan is known as a skilled assassin within Illegal, but she does not rely on the summoning ceremony.
- The case contained a storage medium with a surefire method of destroying an enemy nation.
- Illegal is only an incarnation of evil from Government's point of view and not everything Illegal does is bad.
- To help them complete the job, Illegal sent an assassin summoner and vessel to the airport. The summoner is skilled enough to summon a Divine-class according to a plan rather than relying on coincidence and he is the type of person to mercilessly send that Material after the masked men who could have been defeated by the very weakest Material.
- The Leviathan appeared in the ocean far below while the summoner boy stood on the airport runway.
- The protective circle is meant to protect the summoner…or rather, the summoning ceremony itself from any internal or external threat. It is something like a computer's UPS meant to protect against power outages.
- Not even Kyousuke can defeat Lu Niang Lan in an unarmed battle.

Stage 01: The Rumored Rainy Girl and Librarian-chan

「やっぱり塩バターが最強か。

もう一口、いやいっそ丼ごと交換しよう!」

「やめてくださいよ人生の喜びを丸ごとかっさらうような横暴!!」

(Stage 01 Open 04/30 07:30)

ステージ01

噂の雨中の少女と図書委員ちゃん

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“I guess salt butter is the best after all. Just one more bite. No, let’s trade bowls!”
“Please stop that! Are you trying to steal all the joy from my life!?”
(Stage 01 Open 04/30 07:30)
The Rumored Rainy Girl and Librarian-chan

Part ?

Voice SNS “Voice Friends”.
From an invitation-only voice chat:
Hey have you heard?
You need to be careful on rainy days. It might be best to just not head out on those days. When the school chime sounds all distorted on rainy nights, it’s a sign that the Rainy Girl is about to appear.
The Rainy Girl is a small girl who was killed on the way to or from school one rainy day about five or six years ago I think.
I don’t recommend looking into it since it’ll put you in a bad mood, but it’s apparently a real incident. You can find articles on news sites if you search under the old Natsumi City name. It’s true, I swear.
Now, no one knows what the Rainy Girl looks like.
It’s because she’s holding a battered and broken umbrella that hides her face. But the clothes underneath that are soaked red and, based on the actual incident, you probably don’t want to see her face anyway.
What happens when you meet the Rainy Girl?
That I don’t know.
Ah ha ha. Maybe it would be better with an obvious ending like with the Kuchisake-Onna or Hanako-san. Like if you could never escape or you’d definitely die after meeting her.
But I think that makes it all so cheap.
It’s scary, but it sounds fake. And that’s why people are comfortable whispering about it.
But this Rainy Girl is somehow different.
Maybe it just “feels” real. It’s nothing like all the other stories. There’s no sign of anyone intentionally trying to spread it around, yet it never gets forgotten. There’s a weird ghastliness to it.
Yeah.
I don’t know what happens when you meet the Rainy Girl, but there is one thing in common there.
Everyone who has met her won’t say a word about it.

What could possibly have scared them that badly?

Part 2

“Yesterday’s occupation of A Block’s international airport ended unprecedentedly quickly when all 102 hostages were safely rescued less than fifty minutes after the ordeal began.”
“This has proven to the world just how skilled the police special forces have become to deal with this age of terrorism. However, it was not revealed how the elite team was sent into the airport and even the experts are split on the issue.”
“Toy Dream 35 is a giant amusement park city, so there are rumors even the airport has secret entrances and exits for VIPs to avoid the paparazzi. The internet is filled with speculation that those were used here.”
“More importantly, they may be accused of being overly equipped. All of the criminals’ bodies had far too much damage for the weapons registered with the government. That said, over one hundred lives were at risk, so I doubt they will have to directly face the anger of the carefree civil groups.”
“Also, part of the criminal group left the airport and began a car chase over the vehicle bridges of A Block, but they all ended up crashing. There is still the question of what they were chasing after, so the police will continue investigating every-…”
Shiroyama Kyousuke’s home was not a house, an apartment, or a student dorm. It was a cruiser stopped in a harbor. He yawned as he prepared a breakfast of cereal and milk.
The news coming from the TV was filled with errors, but no one was maliciously lying to take the credit from him.
Anyone too deeply involved in the summoning ceremony industry would be forgotten as soon as they left people’s field of vision. The people were simply left with the fact that the occupation had ended at some point, so they had filled in the gaps the best they could.
“Up next is Space Captain Whitebeard’s weather forecast. Captain!”
“Hello, this is Space Captain Whitebeard in the civilian space station Toy Dream OP-05! Here’s what today’s weather looks like when viewed from up in space. Toy Dream 35 has a 20% chance of rain. Even if it’s only cloudy now, it would be best not to let go of that umbrella!”
“Toy Dream 35 is still running its Rainy Screen campaign, a special event only available on rainy days. How about a lovely show as rain and reflected light are woven together in the night? See the official website for details.”

Unfortunately, his refrigerator had no salad inside.
He had failed to procure the necessary food after the previous day's excitement. He had no choice but to get his "vegetables" by supplementing his bowl of cereal with some dried fruit he had for emergencies.
After finishing breakfast, he stuck the bowl in the water-conserving automatic dishwasher and quickly washed off his sweat in the shower room.
He changed into a red blazer instead of his usual hoodie and pants.
Everyone has probably forgotten by this point, but he was technically a high school student.

Part 3

Of the pizza slice sections of the city, his high school was in R Block. The large square platform was supported by several pillars rising from the ocean. This was a lot like the international airport from the day before, but it was much smaller at only three hundred meters across.
"Hey."
When he entered the classroom, a few boys casually greeted him. Quite a few boys and girls had already gathered for morning homeroom. Kyousuke was not the type to be constantly late, but he did not arrive particularly early either.
There was one person he tended to speak with, so he went with the usual routine and approached a desk at the front of the classroom.
The desk belonged to Rendou Akiya, the head of the going-home club who was known for trying everything and losing interest in everything.
"Did you see the news? Amazing, isn't it? The police did a hell of a job. I hear the Toy Dream Company is taking action too, so people are speculating there'll be an airport occupation attraction out in no time. Y'know, something like a survival game."
Despite the rough manner of speech, Rendou Akiya wore a girl's blazer and pleated skirt and had semi-long brown hair. …But as the name Akiya suggests, he was a boy.
According to the student handbook, "All students must wear the designated uniform as they diligently work at their studies."
In other words, it never specified a difference in uniforms for boys and girls. …Although it was probably just an oversight because that difference was assumed.
And Rendou Akiya only wanted to expand the realm of fashion, so he was not actually a so-called "trap". The boys who had made a mistake there and

sent him a love letter had received a broken nose as a response, so it was an important point to keep in mind.
“What’s this, what’s this? Are you talking about a new job opportunity?”
Then a girl with braided hair and thin-framed glasses approached.
“Oh, it’s just you, Librarian-chan.”
“Learn my name already. It’s going to be May soon, you son of a bitch.”
It was the Librarian-chan who had a way of ruining everyone’s image of her along with their hopes and dreams.
After replying in a low voice, she dropped her voice down to a whisper.
“(C’mon, if they’re taking applications for a part-time job, tell me. I have a weakness for that kind of thing.)”
“You’re getting a little ahead of yourself. We’re only talking about rumors of a new attraction.”
“(If you only look for openings after everyone’s talking about it, all the positions will already be filled. You can’t get the best position unless you act first. And I think that applies to just about everything.)”
“Anyway, I think this would be on the horror side of things, and don’t you have trouble with that?”
“What do you mean by that?”
This was based on the distorted version of Kyousuke and the others’ actions.
But that distortion did not affect him, so he had no way of knowing how exactly it had been distorted. He just hoped they had not left any odd hints at the scene.
“Apparently the Rainy Girl was spotted before and after the occupation.”
But his fears had been way off base.
He doubted busty Lu Niang Lan would fall into the category of “girl”.
“Online, they’re saying it might have been a harbinger of things to come like when dolphins go nuts before a disaster. I doubt the Toy Dream Company really understands Japanese horror, but if they go for it, this might turn into a haunted house.”
“Ah…ah ha ha. In that case, I think I’ll sit this one out…”
“You really can’t stand horror, can you? You even avert your gaze when you see things like scary fairy tales.”
“What’s wrong with that? Those things are sick. There’s nothing wrong with having your corners rounded off by the flow of time like rocks on the riverbed. I don’t understand why everyone goes out of their way to make rough and inaccessible stories just because they’re original.”
Librarian-chan laughed dryly and really did take a step back.
She seemed to have a lot of trouble with that genre.
Kyousuke frowned.
“Isn’t the Rainy Girl a ghost that appears on the way to or from school?”
“Yeah, but thanks to the spread of rumors online, she’s apparently showing up in front of schools in Guam and New York these days. What a shame. If

she only appeared inside the school, we might have been able to make a great haunted house for the cultural festival."
The way Rendou Akiya spoke made it obvious he did not believe the stories. For anyone not involved in the world of the summoning ceremony, that was the normal view. Librarian-chan was overly sensitive to still be afraid of ghost stories in high school. Although just like having trouble with seeing blood, it was something some people simply could not overcome through effort alone.
"I've heard that your class's festival attraction is factored into your student score."
"And I've heard the Toy Dream Company sends out scouts to check them out like a ramen magazine's investigator. That means we can't get careless. We're talking about a global corporation here. If we gather attention in a good way, we'll be set for life, don't you-…"
Rendou Akiya was cut off by a blaring emergency bell.
However, the students did not start running around in a panic because of the alarm. They first looked up at the speaker in confusion.
"What a pain. Did some idiot get all worked up and hit the button?" muttered Rendou, but things seemed to be different.
The usual tones came from the speaker, followed by a girl, presumably from the broadcast committee, speaking.
"We will now begin surprise emergency crime prevention training. Each class is to obey their teacher's instructions and quickly evacuate. I repeat…"
"Ugh. Did you hear that?" asked Librarian-chan in disgust. "It's already started raining outside, but do they want us to all gather outside and listen to the principal speak?"
"Since it's raining, won't they change it to the gym?" suggested Kyousuke.
"It's a pain either way!" shouted Rendou. "What's this about? Was I not the only idiot who got caught up in all the talk about the airport occupation on the news? If terrorists or a gunman attacked the school, what good is it sending us all out in the halls?"
"Morning homeroom hasn't even started, so what are they going to do about attendance?"
"Oh, damn. If my absence would've been overlooked in all the confusion, I should've gone back to bed this morning."
But their complaints changed nothing.
The event was clearly pointless, but it was well known that mocking this kind of training could lead to a serious deduction on one's student score.
On the instructions of their homeroom teacher (a gentle type with gigantic breasts whose secret nickname was "The Cow"), they walked down the hall in two lines, one for boys and one for girls. It felt like being forced to hold up a sign saying "Please slaughter us all. We'll be your meat shield."
As they descended the stairs, they ran into another class.
It was an upperclassman class.

“Outta the way, first years. It’s not about being polite, you idiots. Those are the rules.”
“Don’t get involved. They don’t look too bright, so anything you say would be a waste of time.”
The group of boys chuckled as they passed by.
Rendou dug into his ear with his pinky.
“Ahh, ahh. They’ve given up on their humanity already? I don’t want to end up like that. Do they think that single year of difference makes them adults or something? They might as well be old men with plenty of ego but no actual ability. I can already tell they’ll still be failures even at thirty and forty. I bet the only thing that’ll change is how much hair they have left.”
“Yeah, but high schoolers like us might disappoint some middle schoolers if they saw us.”
“I’m not proud of it, but when I was in middle school, I believed I’d lose my virginity the instant I advanced to high school. I thought a kind upperclassman or female teacher would lure me into the gym supply shed at the opening ceremony.”
“Really? I still thought I could save at least one world back then.”
The two boys laughed like idiots.
And no one realized that one of them had said something which may have been no laughing matter.
Then Kyousuke noticed a gentle citrus scent.
One of the upperclassmen was a girl with long black hair tied near the end with a large ribbon and with a chest large enough to give Lu Niang Lan a run for her money. She gestured him over with a hand, winked, and whispered in his ear.

It was unclear if she realized she was squishing her soft breasts with her own arm.
“(Sorry about having you go along with this boring event first thing in morning, Shiroyama Boy. But this student assembly will use up first period, so hopefully that makes up for it.)”
It may have been to keep their conversation private, but she was far closer than he had expected.
She was not actually touching him, but he could feel the warmth from her soft cheek.
“Should the student council president really be saying that?”
Kyousuke replied wearily and the upperclassman replied as a sweet smell wafted from her hair.
“(Don’t be silly. I was forced to spend all night writing up a speech for the assembly greeting. I don’t like this any better than you. Although I am glad this is getting me out of my first period social studies elective.)”
“Really? You chose it yourself and you’re still complaining?”
“(It’s a miracle that anyone can make a world history class that boring. Why does he just write a list of dates up on the board? He doesn’t understand all the romance found between the lines. And unfortunately, he’s a complete lost cause as far as that’s concerned.)”
She waved goodbye and continued down the stairs.
Librarian-chan cut in then.
“Ugh. She’s just on an entirely different level from the rest of us if she thinks history is normally any fun.”
“Huh? But Librarian-chan, as our Librarian-chan, don’t you love things like Water Margin and Shakespeare?”
“Learn my name already. And I only do this to establish my character. While I do like books, I don’t really know that much about them. I’ve only ever bought two or three books and the rest I borrow from my parents’ bookcase.”
Hearing that felt like seeing an idol without makeup on.
Her student score was likely composed of magic.
Kyousuke started feeling a little blue, but Rendou Akiya made an unexpected recovery.
“Keh, keh. But all you read are surprisingly fantastical fairy tales.”
“Sh-shut up!! Toy Dream 35 is a foreign-owned amusement park city, so we kind of are citizens of a fairy tale!!”
Librarian-chan blushed, but she seemed unable to deny her love of fairy tales.
As Rendou had said, it was a surprising side to her.
“But that wealthy president with F1 specs is nothing like us commoners with moped specs,” said Rendou. “She’s the most likely candidate to be recruited by Toy Dream HQ. Her economic thesis ‘Repeat Customers and the Catharsis of Repetition’ was published in the British magazine ‘Business & Credit’ and gathered a ton of attention. She’s on her way to an important

position in a global corporation. Cut the string of her balloon and she'd probably fly up above the clouds. She's nothing like us."
Kyousuke had been exactly right about the students gathering in the gym for the surprise crime prevention training.
What good was gathering here if this had become a school of death with terrorists and gunmen wandering around? Kyousuke was used to fighting, but even the other students could tell this would become a giant execution ground.
The principal's speech was so bad that even a summoner like Alice (with) Rabbit Shiroyama Kyousuke's endurance was pushed to its limits as he tried not to fall asleep on his feet. If this was a supernatural ability to distort people's sense of time without relying on a Material, it was a high level one.
And after that lesson on how *not* to give a speech, the upperclassman's speech was all the more effective. It felt like being handed frigid mint ice cream after wandering on and on through the desert.
"What matters most is to be prepared for the unexpected and the best way of doing that is repetitive practice. In other words, these are preparatory exercises to make sure your knees are not trembling uncontrollably when it actually matters. Think of it like swimming in the ocean. If a child who has never even placed his face below water is suddenly thrown into the sea, everyone knows what will happen, right? And unfortunately there is no life buoy analogue in a firefight. The only way to learn how to swim is practice. Falsely assuming you know what to do is the scariest thing of all."
The text itself was the formal language of a school assembly speech, but unlike the principal's bland reading, she added gestures at the important points and changed the inflection of her voice to create dramatic waves. It was the difference between "reading" and "performing" a speech.
She also gave familiar examples to deal with people's frustrations and confusion as to why they had to do this, which provided the same sense of accomplishment as solving a riddle. Instead of feeling you had simply been told the answer, you felt you alone had figured out the answer because of how smart you were.
It did not matter if you had been guided every step of the way by her explanations.
"If she put that together overnight, she could become a playwright or a politician's secretary," commented Rendou.
"But that means working behind the scenes. Don't you think she would look more at home in the spotlight herself?" asked Librarian-chan in the line next to them. "But if there's this much of a difference, why doesn't the principal just get her to write his speech for him?"
"I bet it's a matter of pride. Do that and the adult will cry."
As Kyousuke and the others whispered to each other, a member of the broadcast committee brought the assembly to a close with a microphone in one hand.

“That was Student Council President Benikomichi Fuuki-san. With that, the emergency crime prevention training is complete. Classes will resume as normal with second period, so please return to your classrooms in a timely fashion.”
In other words, it was just another peaceful day.
Otherwise, they could not spend so much time on training like this.

Part 4

The lunch break began.
Shiroyama Kyousuke tended to eat lunch alone.
This was simply due to the fact that his classmates would scatter as soon as the lunch break started. And as a summoner, they would forget about him as soon as he left their field of vision. They would forget any kind of promise they might have made, so any promises to eat lunch together were rendered invalid.
For that reason, he went to the cafeteria on his own, ordered some salt butter ramen, and took a seat. Then an upperclassman girl sat across from him.
It was Student Council President Benikomichi Fuuki.
“Do you mind if I sit with you, Shiroyama Boy?”
“No, go ahead. …What is that?”
As long as they were sitting across from him, a normal person would not forget about him. And their temporarily forgotten memories would return during those times and smoothly accumulate across meetings.
The boy’s puzzled question was in reference to the mysterious dish on her tray that was not registered in any of the cafeteria vending machines.
But this was not a luxurious lunch provided as a special privilege for the president.
“It’s low calorie konjac Chinese noodles. They’re testing it out for the cafeteria menu.”
“It’s not an orthodox dish, but it also doesn’t go far enough with the novelty factor either.”
“I think it’s a health food that’s abandoned trying to be good as food.”
“Health food? But even if you make the noodles out of konjac, doesn’t the sauce have a lot of fat?”
“I’m more worried about the taste. Describe it as fancily as you like, no one’s going to order something that tastes bad. That’s why you have that meaningless butter on top of your ramen.”

“Yeah, why does it seem so much more bourgeois just by adding a clump of butter on top?”
“I know what you mean. I don’t like the vinegary pickles on a burger, but when you make it a fresh slice of tomato instead, it seems so much more luxurious. And yet the pickle is actually more expensive.”
“The lemon next to karaage.”
“The vanilla ice cream in an ice cream float.”
“The grilled rice ball you make on the edge of the grill when cooking yakiniku or barbecue.”
“The sugar doll on top of a cake is just the best, isn’t it?”
For some reason, Shiroyama Kyousuke and Benikomichi Fuuki exchanged a firm handshake.
It felt like they had found someone who truly understood them.
The student council president looked like her flesh and blood were made of pianos, violins, tea ceremonies, horseback riding, and conversational English, but she seemed to know the “proper” way to eat ramen. She used wooden chopsticks like normal and she slurped up the noodles like normal.
…Although the way she used one hand to brush her long hair up over her ear was pointlessly seductive.
It was rare to find someone who actually looked out of place *not* twirling it up like pasta.
“Hm? Do I have something on my face?”
“No.”
“It tastes okay, I guess. I have to admit I’m surprised how much the texture is just like ramen. I bet people will figure they might as well eat normal ramen, so I’m worried how they’ll advertise this flavor.”
“It would be perfect if you could simply say ‘the same taste with half the calories’.”
“Konjac noodles aren’t that effective. But it’s perfectly edible. Here, have a bite.”
“But my tongue is growing fat on salt butter, the top class ramen flavor!”
“That’s why I’m jealous. I’m telling you to give me a bite for a bite of this.”
They stuck their chopsticks in each other’s bowls and traded noodles. For some reason, there was no romantic feeling of, “Kyah! Is this what they call an indirect kiss?” Ramen was the ultimate food of the masses, but it was not even remotely suited for romance.
As for of the rumored konjac noodles…
“It tastes like normal ramen and you can eat it like normal. Yeah, it feels like an evolutionary dead end. I’m not sure how else they can improve this…”
“Right? This is the product you hate to have as a producer. And the developer hasn’t done anything wrong, so you can’t just abandon them. … But damn. I guess salt butter is the best after all. Just one more bite. No, let’s trade bowls! C’mon, this is your chance to have this mysterious new product all to yourself!!”

“Please stop that! Are you trying to steal all the joy from my life!? After eating this, those konjac noodles barely feel like eating anything! It’s like chewing on a flavorless sponge!!”
Kyousuke bent protectively over his bowl and glared at her with a fairly serious look in his eyes.
And then they overhead the conversation of an athletic-seeming group carrying their trays to an empty table.
“It’s true. A first year who stayed behind to clean up the equipment said he saw that Rainy Girl!!”
“Yeah, right. I bet he saw it online and decided to have some fun with it.”
“It’s based on a story of a girl who had a grass sickle swung down on her head nineteen times, right? And by a huge man who barely had a human skeletal structure thanks to genetic tuning. The murderer scares me way more than the ghost.”
The topic dried out the atmosphere.
After the group passed by, Benikomichi Fuuki took a sip from her cup of water.
“There’s been more and more talk of that around here lately. Based on the age of the ‘ghost’, the story probably started at an elementary school somewhere in Japan, but the school connection allowed it to spread to high schools like this. It’s spreading all over the country and the world thanks to the internet, so the age of the Rainy Girl probably changes to match the school, just like with Hanako-san.”
“Do you believe it?”
“Why would I? …Although hearing that would probably make my tearful and religious mother sad.”
That may have been the standard reaction.
At least, that is, for normal people who knew nothing of the summoning ceremony and had no fear of being forgotten by someone.
And as Kyousuke thought about that…
“Ahyhay, how hahout hoo hade hor hork hor hy haruho?” (Anyway, how about you trade your pork for my naruto?)
“Ah! Why would you suggest that *after* shoving my roast pork in your mouth!?”

Part 5

In the world of the summoning ceremony, ghosts were said to come from a place, not an individual.

Something was needed to pass between this world and the other world.
When that grew clogged up for some reason, the soul that should have departed would be stuck there.
Ghost exterminations were one of the most basic requests.
Unless the ghost was a very powerful vengeful spirit, it was almost never necessary to fight the ghost with a Material.
In most cases, one only needed to throw an Incense Grenade and set up an Artificial Sacred Ground. The ghost was a paranormal being, so the Artificial Sacred Ground would give them a boost and allow them to wield greater power than normal.
However, they could not actually use that power.
Once the conditions were set to summon a Material, the “clog” would be forcibly removed and the ghost would vanish like the rainwater left in the drain pipe.
Did the ghosts go to heaven as the religious claimed, were they sent to the other world where all the Materials lurked, or were they simply annihilated?
The answer to that question was not yet known.
But as far as the humans in this world were concerned, the problem was solved.
That was really all they knew.
Very little was known about the phenomenon of ghosts, even by the top tier summoners who were within arm’s reach of the Regulation-class, Divine-class, Unexplored-class, and even the White Queen at the top.

Part 6

That afternoon, the rain was gradually picking up.
It created a constant pitter-patter on the classroom windows.
There were a lot of people passing around notes or stealthily typing on their cellphones because those on sports teams were competing for training spots. On rainy days, they could only use the weight room or sprint along the hallways and stairs. And while they normally would not want to run, rainy days were an exception. It may have been the same effect as the butter on top of ramen. They were all trying to secure the hallways for their team.
Once the afternoon homeroom was over, school was finally out.
Once his classmates scattered, they would soon forget all about Kyousuke, but that did not happen immediately.

In the slight time between the end of class and the club activities, Kyousuke spoke with Librarian-chan.
“Ugh… It’s still raining. Is it going to keep pouring into the night too?”
“Huh? Do you have plans to go somewhere, Librarian-chan?”
“Could you make at least some effort to learn my name? I have a meeting with the Library Committee and then it’s my shift at the library counter. If I could at least play some classical music, I might be able to nap comfortably.”
Then why is the rain a problem? wondered Kyousuke. A rainy day would not be enough to get the library books damp.
Then Rendou Akiya popped in from the side and cut in.
“I bet she’s afraid of that Rainy Girl rumor. There’s talk that the original story was actually in this city. And this season, it’ll get dark before her library work is done.”
“N-no, it isn’t that…”
“But your knees are shaking. If we really make this into a haunted house for the cultural festival, maybe I could get some girls to cling to me in fright. Hah hah hah!!”
“Well, I-I’ve got to get going…” said Librarian-chan as she walked quickly out of the classroom.
Rendou tilted his head after she left.
“What is it?” asked Kyousuke.
“I was just wondering if she always had that much trouble with ghost stories.”
“It’s only the end of April, so don’t ask me.”
“She went to the same middle school as me, but I don’t think she used to be that easily scared…”
Unable to answer his question, Rendou too left the classroom.
A few students remained, but Kyousuke decided to spread out his school supplies on his own desk.
Maintaining decent grades was not easy while living a double life as a student and summoner.

Part 7

“Since it’s gravitational acceleration, you just use g, right? No, in this case, you don’t need to multiply by 9.8. Do you remember the formula for a conical pendulum? Hint: it uses pi and a root.”
“…”

“C’mon, you’re the one that chose physics for your science elective, right? And yet…how should I put this? It just doesn’t seem like a good fit for you. It’s not that you’re dumb or don’t have a scientific mind…it’s more like *you’re used to the physical constants of some other world*. It’s really hard to correct because *it’s wrong and yet it all fits together.*”
“Um, senpai?”
Kyousuke was alone in the classroom with President Benikomichi Fuuki. She sat across from him at a fairly small desk and asked “What is it?” with a puzzled look.
He felt no need to hold back.
“What in the world are you doing?”
“Taking a short break. What do you think is going on right now in the locked room known as the student council room? The answer will fill you with despair.”
“Then I’d rather not know.”
“Simply put, the Secretary and Treasurer are grabbing at each other’s hair and fighting. They just can’t reach an agreement on the budget. Then again, those two are in love, so it may be a form of communication for them.”
“Why would you warn me and then tell me anyway!? And that’s personal information!!”
The president readily ignored his protests, placed her elbow on the top of his desk, and rested her cheek in her hand.
This placed two large objects (which will not be explicitly named here) on the desk with enough force he could have sworn they made a noise.
Normal people forgot about summoners when not in their field of vision. Kyousuke could only curse the fact that he had carelessly decided to study in a noticeable place. He had been forced to play the role of a temple refuge.
“At first they were thankful when I helped mediate things for them. But lately it feels like they just assume I’ll do it, so I tried leaving them be. As expected, they looked troubled but had gone too far to back down, so they started attacking each other. Now, which one will you bet on!?”
“Attention, student council!! I have found your inappropriate president over here!!”
This was getting to be a pain, so Kyousuke called out loudly and had his mouth quickly covered.
A soft, gentle, and decidedly not male hand covered the lower half of his face.
People would forget about a summoner when not looking at them, but his voice would still be perceived as “a voice they did not quite recognize”. He had planned on repeating that trivial experiment, but he was stopped.
“Now, now. There’s no need to choke up just because the well behaved, academically gifted, literarily and militarily skilled, peerless in battle, invincible, and beautiful student council president is willing to help you with your studies. I will even allow you to lick my palm if you like.”

“Pwah. I don’t want anything to do with someone whose self-aggrandizement grows more and more frightening like that. I get the feeling you’re going to crush my head in her hand.”
“Oh, how boring.”
The president traced her index finger along Kyousuke’s lips and then returned to resting her head in her hand.
“When you get down to it, all academics is about romance, not just history. Just think of how many scholars’ lives were spent on each discovery and each formula. And things like English grammar and pi are a lot easier to remember if you learn about the drama surrounding them. Empathy is the best way to learn. I guarantee it.”
“Senpai, reading an assigned book to write a report on it is far more painful than reading a book you chose and bought yourself.”
“Hm. Unfortunately, the concept of ‘forcing myself to learn’ is foreign to me… If you find something you don’t understand, isn’t it human nature to be curious why it exists and what led its discovery or origin?”
“…”
(If you find something you don’t understand, hm?)
Kyousuke’s mind briefly filled with the color white and a *great evil* shaped like a girl flashed through the back of his mind, but he shook his head to drive out the hallucination.
This upperclassman who knew nothing of the summoning ceremony giggled and pointed her index finger at his nose.
She kept it right on the verge of touching the tip of his nose and spoke.
“I feel like you’re looking to some far distant place.”
“Where did this come from?”
“You’re aware there’s something off about you, aren’t you? It’s not that you’re broken or damaged; you’re just a little off. Your heart is a lot like these silly physics equations. The way you act is weird for a normal high school boy, but it feels like it would *fit perfectly* in some other place.”
“Just to be clear, I’m not part of any club and I don’t have a part-time job.”
“Ha ha. I see. Well, that’s fine. To be honest, I’m feeling a little tired of a high school life where everything goes perfectly. So, well, you don’t have to tell me now if you don’t want to. But if you ever do feel like telling me, then could you tell me about the other side of your double life? It can be a UFO Research Council or the Youkai Busters or whatever else.”
The extremely curious girl moved her face in close and actually did just barely touch her index finger to his nose.
“There’s just something pleasant about how you’re ‘off’. If there’s a world where that’s normal, then I’m sure it would fill me with some extremely pleasant stimulation.”
“I’ll use my best judgment.”
“That doesn’t sound promising.”
To avoid answering, Kyousuke reached for the highlighter he used to mark things in his notes.

However, he could not find it.
He wondered if it had fallen on the floor, but it was nowhere there either. Something was pressing down on the desk with almost audible weight. The highlighter was being engulfed by two objects that were quite difficult for a teenage boy to directly describe!
“Hm? What’s the matter? Do you need help looking for something, Shiroyama Boy?”
“Are you doing this on purpose!? Is this an incredibly soft version of the Mouth of Truth!?”

Part 8

Once it was time for all the students to leave, Shiroyama Kyousuke ran into Librarian-chan in the hallway.
“Huh? Shiroyama-kun, you’re not in a club, so what were you doing all this time?”
“The main job of a student, I guess.”
“?”
The student council president had been dragged back to her home ground when the other executives came crying to her. Not even Kyousuke knew what had happened to her. She may have been living up to her self-proclaimed titles of peerless in battle and invincible by beating up the rampaging Secretary and Treasurer with the crane style.
Kyousuke and Librarian-chan walked down the hall while chatting.
The fluorescent lights had already been switched off, so the only illumination came from the city lights outside. The raindrops hitting the windows placed an amoeba-like filter over the outside scenery.
“They keep talking about that Rainy Screen, but will anyone actually visit an amusement park when it keeps raining like this?”
“…”
“Librarian-chan?”
“Eh, ah!? R-right, right. But things seem pretty busy at work. They say a lot of people are gathering for the novelty of it all. Although the concept itself is pretty simple. They’re just using a projector to display video footage on all the raindrops while playing the sound with directional speakers.”
Kyousuke wondered if she no longer cared about her name, but he decided it would be best not to ask.
“Does that mean you have part-time work after your library work? That must be tough.”

“Tell me about it. The Rainy Screen is supposed to be for people to watch from their hotels or cars on rainy nights, and today I’m working at a delivery service for sports cars on the vehicle bridges. You know, the one that relies on their smartphone’s GPS and guarantees the food will be there in thirty minutes or less. That isn’t a job to do in the rain.”
“That sounds like a dangerous job for a girl to be doing at night.”
“J-just cause it’s night doesn’t mean there will be ghosts!! D-dyon’t be so unshientific!”
“Not what I meant. Over the phone, you can’t tell if the order is going to one man all on his own, right? And if you’re delivering to a car, he can park in some deserted place and claim it’s just a nice quiet spot to view the scenery.”
“We always head out in groups of two and we’re issued mace and stun guns.”
“And why didn’t you think of the possibility of those being taken from you and used against you? If they order from a stolen phone, the data at the store won’t be enough to identify them.”
Librarian-chan froze over at his casual criticism. She seemed to have belatedly realized just how thin of ice she had been treading on.
“Heh. Eh heh heh. By the way, Shiroyama-kun, are you free tonight? Do you maybe have plans to coincidentally take the exact same route as me!?”
“No thanks! That sounds like a huge pain in the ass! I’d be out in the rain all night doing the exact same thing as you, so why would I be the only one not getting paid!?”
“As a bonus, you’d get to have a walking date with a girl and you wouldn’t have to pay for dinner! The place I work is French, so the veal is really good!!”
“Ghh…!?”
He was once more struck by the same effect as the butter on the salt butter ramen.
This was veal. Not just beef. Veal.
He had no idea if the veal would be stewed, grilled, or whatever else, but the power of the word “veal” just about took his soul away.
“It’s the exact same substance, it’s the exact same substance. There’s no difference in the molecular structure…mumble mumble…”
“But it’s veal! C’mon, c’mon! Even if it’s just the leftovers for the workers, you don’t get to eat that often, right?”
“Y-you’re not bad for a Librarian-chan.”
“That’s destroying my character, so use my name. And I take it that means you agree to go with me?”
“I guess I can if it means veal, but are you headed there now? Or is there some time in between?”
“Hm? Does it matter?”
She would forget this promise as soon as she took her eyes off of him, but he had no way of explaining that. And using a cellphone to regroup with

someone who had forgotten about you was a lot more difficult than it sounded. Until he was in their field of vision again, they would never remember no matter how many times he explained it in words.
“My shift begins at 7:30, so…oh, we’re actually cutting it pretty close. We might not make it if the trains are stopped due to an accident or something. Anyway, let’s start by heading to S Block. That’s where the restaurant is.”
“I guess I’ll be nice and point it out: you’re using me for insurance, but I’m a guy too. Are you sure you should be bringing me into deserted areas at night?”
“What? You’re completely safe, Shiroyama-kun. You’re like someone from an educational puppet show, not someone from a Monday night drama. We could be alone in a hotel with pink wallpaper and nothing would happen.”
The summoner decided he was not going to shed any tears.
So he responded with a serious look on his face.
“Now, then. I think it’s about time I chose *not* to save someone for once.”
“Wah!! Wait, wait, wait! If you back out now, I’ll cry, I’ll hate you, and I’ll piss myself in fear right in front of you!!”
Footsteps fled down the dark hallway and more footsteps pursued them.
But Kyousuke screwed up when he lost too much time changing into his leather shoes in the entrance area. Librarian-chan managed to grab the back of his blazer.
“I can’t believe you! I really can’t believe you! You get me that scared and then you seriously try to run off!? If I hadn’t grabbed you here, you would’ve run off into the rain, wouldn’t you have!?”
“I guess I should’ve thrown out all common sense and left in my indoor shoes.”
“You monster!! How can you do that when a girl is in serious trouble!?”
Librarian-chan sounded like she was about to erupt, but then she came to an abrupt stop.
There was a simple reason.
All of the school’s announcement speakers exploded.
No, they only burst with a great cacophony far removed from the kind of noise they were meant to produce.
As a summoner, Kyousuke was relatively accustomed to bright lights and great noises during battle, but even he grimaced and covered his ears at this deafening vortex of noise. It seemed to be coming from the school’s speakers, but some of the speakers may have truly been broken by the very noise they were producing.
The wall of sound continued for about ten seconds.
After that, all sound vanished.
A thought occurred to Shiroyama Kyousuke amid a silence so intense it almost hurt his hears.
(That noise… It was some out-of-tune electronic tones that lasted about ten seconds. Was it…*the school chime*?)
Even the sound of the falling rain sounded distant.

He also realized Librarian-chan had not said anything for a while.
She was looking at something and had entirely *forgotten* that Kyousuke was right next to her.
She was looking outside.
She was looking beyond the school entrance.
After spotting something there, her eyes had widened and her entire body had stiffened.
(What's there…?)
Kyousuke turned his head to look that way while an absurd rumor came to mind.
The ghost story had spread across Japan and the entire world thanks to the internet.
One had to be careful when a distorted version of the school chime played on a rainy night.
That was a sign that the Rainy Girl was going to appear.
"…cha…"
A scratchy noise escaped Librarian-chan's lips.
Shiroyama Kyousuke saw it too.

The rain continued to pour outside the entranceway and a girl of only ten to thirteen stood there. However, he was unsure if the term “cute” applied.
First, the girl’s face was hidden behind a battered umbrella.
Second, the girl’s raincoat was stained red.
As a professional, Kyousuke understood. That amount of blood was far beyond a lethal amount. And based on the muddiness of the blood, it was not fresh blood that had just erupted from a wound.
Nevertheless, she stood there.
She stood in Shiroyama Kyousuke and Librarian-chan’s way as if to not let them leave the school.
She was a ghost.
She was the Rainy Girl.
She had lost her life in a gruesome incident from the past and now she appeared on the way back from school for some reason.
That was how Kyousuke interpreted the situation.
But he was wrong.
A moment later, Librarian-chan moved her trembling lips to speak.
“Onee-chan…?”

Part 9

During their lunch break, President Benikomichi Fuuki had mentioned something to Shiroyama Kyousuke.
Based on the age of the ghost, the rumors of the Rainy Girl had their origins in an elementary school somewhere in Japan, and they had spread to high schools as well due to the “school chime” connection. And the stories would be customized for each school, so the Rainy Girl’s age would likely change to match the high school setting.
But that was wrong.
The Rainy Girl was not a ghost fixed to a single location.
She was fixed to an individual and had thus been “brought to” this high school with that person.
(That explains why Librarian-chan was so afraid of the Rainy Girl stories. She may have already known what it was talking about…)
No.
Or…
(Was she not thinking of it as a hallucination and illusion? Had its existence already been proven to her? …That would mean this isn’t her first time meeting the ghost.)

Unlike the foolish experts on TV, a summoner like Kyousuke did not bother proving the supernatural phenomenon occurring before his eyes. He could tell it was real.
The ghost slowly approached with the unpleasant sound of wet rubber. It was nothing more than the soles of the children's rain boots rubbing against the ground, but each additional piece of information seemed to infect his mind.
The ghost did not speak.
She may have been moving her lips behind the battered and broken umbrella, but her voice did not reach Kyousuke and Librarian-chan's ears.
"Ah, ahh…"
Librarian-chan could not even back away.
She simply trembled in place and shook her head over and over. Her mind was doing everything it could to reject the scene before her eyes.
But that was impossible.
Nothing she did would change the horrific reality before her eyes.
The Rainy Girl would enter the school building at any moment.
"No."
Librarian-chan's lips released what may have been a word or just a sound. Even so, it was filled with an unbelievable amount of raw emotion.
"No… I can't go…where you are, Onee-chan. I just can't. You're already dead and I'm still alive! So…there's nothing I can do!!"
The sound of the small rain boots stopped.
The broken umbrella spun around.
Eyes that were dyed red by something other than being bloodshot peered out through the gaps in the torn material.
A powerful stench like a crushed frog on a rainy road followed that gaze.
It was like her hostility and killer intent had been given physical form.
Librarian-chan's mind seemed unable to reach the standard idea of turning tail and running.
"So leave…just leave!! You aren't supposed to be here, Onee-chan. You wanted to go here and we should have all been here together, but even if that chance was cruelly taken from you, you can't be here!! So…!!"
"…"
(Her sister, hm?)
Shiroyama Kyousuke narrowed his eyes a little at that relationship.
He was reminded of the twin shrine maidens who had formed a summoner and vessel pair.
Then he thought a bit about the contents of his school bag.
Exterminating a ghost was one of the most basic jobs for a summoner.
There was no need to summon a Material and fight. Just by setting up the Artificial Sacred Ground, the ghost would vanish and go "somewhere else".
But he had no vessel at the moment.

Without meeting that minimum requirement as a summoner, throwing the Incense Grenade he had hidden in his bag would not set up an Artificial Sacred Ground.
But looking at it another way, that just meant he needed a vessel.
No talent or skill was necessary. He just needed the conditions for setting up an Artificial Sacred Ground.
But…
“What if…”
Shiroyama Kyousuke looked to both Librarian-chan and the Rainy Girl and then spoke quietly to draw his classmate’s attention.
“What if there was a way to erase your sister…the Rainy Girl from this place? Does she go to heaven, doe she go to hell, or is she simply annihilated? No one knows what happens to the soul, but what if there was a way to erase her from this place?”
If Librarian-chan was telling the truth here, then the Rainy Girl was her family, no matter how much she had changed.
This would erase a human soul.
It would obliterate the last remaining traces.
Would she accept that or not?
Librarian-chan moved her trembling lips to answer the question.
As she did, she thought of this ghost who had been so utterly transformed that she would bare her fangs against her own family.
“If there’s a way to do that, then go ahead and do it…”
She would accept it.
“I can’t…I can’t bear to see this!! It may have been horribly unfair that my sister was attacked. You can hardly blame her for hating the world after that. But…but! Nothing she does can save her now!!”
At the same time, the footsteps grew harder.
The rain boots had crossed the line from the wet outside to the dry inside.
She had taken the first clear step into the school building’s entranceway.
She had stepped into their territory.
Librarian-chan viewed it that way and it broke down the final dam inside her.
“So help me. I don’t want to die and letting my sister suffer any longer won’t accomplish anything. If there’s a way to stop this bloody despair, then tell me! If there’s a way to do it, then help meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!”
“Understood.”
A switch was thrown in Shiroyama Kyousuke’s mind.
He used his canine tooth to make a small cut on his index finger and let a drop of blood form on the surface.
Then he recited the necessary text.
“I bind this covenant of blood in the name of The Spirit of Fluttering ‘Yellow’ Gills that Rules the Heavens (s – a – so – voz – tix – ei – yw – za), one of the Three which manage and guide the summoning ceremony. You are of

human flesh with a proper heart and soul, yet from this moment onward, you shall be a limited vessel that can hold all things.”
The solid footsteps continued.
But Kyousuke paid them no heed. What mattered most here was not hiding or running. He had to complete the necessary ceremony as quickly as possible.
“You shall be a lord of emptiness that uses the power filling you to at times bend the laws of this world.”
Librarian-chan could not have understood what the ceremony meant.
Even so, her focus was drawn in toward the drop of blood on the index finger held out toward her.
It inspired a devilish fascination.
Even though she did not understand what it meant, it forced an understanding of what she had to do. Her small tongue poked out from between her lips and calmly licked up the drop of Kyousuke’s blood.
“So I shall prepare this vessel. I am a summoner, unable to leave the world of man, yet a symbol of haughty intellect that uses power from beyond the world of man to guide the world of man to the next age!!”
A moment later, the wind whipped up around them.
The contract was complete.
As the gust of wind nearly shattered the entranceway’s windows, Kyousuke reached into his school bag.
He pulled out an Incense Grenade.
They did not need to fight the Rainy Girl. Simply setting up the Artificial Sacred Ground would annihilate most ghosts.
But…
Nevertheless…
Before he could pull the pin, the school’s speakers produced another explosion. Kyousuke grimaced and shrank down as if lightning had struck nearby.
He had taken his eyes off of the ghost for less than a second, but when he looked back up, she was already gone.
The Rainy Girl had vanished.
Only the sound of the rain ruled the otherwise silent darkness.
Kyousuke no longer had a use for the Incense Grenade in his hand and Librarian-chan’s voice reached his ears.
“She’ll be back. On the next rainy night…”
She gave a thin, exhausted smile.
“She’ll be back to kill me.”

Investigation Records of a Certain Pair of Twins 01

A monorail ran through the city’s night.
It was past seven and more of the passengers were beginning to be office workers rather than students. The first after-work rush hour had begun and it was also raining, so there were more passengers than normal. And the air was quite damp, either due to the raindrops on the umbrellas or due to people’s sweat.
The colors of one pair of twins stood out among them.
Meinokawa Renge.
Meinokawa Higan.
They were both long-haired shrine maidens in bright red outfits. Their faces looked similar, but one had black hair and black eyes while the other had blonde hair and blue eyes. At the same time, they lacked the unnatural appearance of dyed hair or color contacts.
Two shrine maidens sitting alongside people in suits may have looked out of place, but even Shinto officials shopped online and wore 3D goggles at the movie theater.
The two of them were looking at the same notebook-sized tablet.
“That means this train we’re on is the one in question,” said Renge, the one with long black hair.
She used her fingertips to zoom in on a newspaper’s letters-to-the-editor section.
“A story from Toy Dream 35’s Nohara Amahiko-kun (Age 9). When people fall asleep on the last train or on a train that begins deadheading, they go missing and never return. But for some reason, the fact that people are vanishing never ends up in the news.”
“H-hmm. Would a nine-year-old boy, um, really know much about being on the last train?”
“That may be why he added ‘or on a train that begins deadheading’. Just like the Kuchisake-Onna, it may be a story meant to frighten students on the way back from cram school. Like wondering what happens to the drunk man who’s passed out on the train when they get off.”
“But if that’s all it is…”
“Yes. Then a Freedom summoner like us wouldn’t have been hired to investigate it.”
Renge was most interested in the last part about the missing people never ending up in the news. It was quite convenient for the purposes of a rumor, but it was simply not possible. If someone vanished, someone would notice: family, friends, lovers, classmates, coworkers, etc.
However…
“When a summoner or vessel pass Award 100, they’re rejected from people’s perceptions and memories. I wonder if this monorail or the switchyard are hiding something that can only be explained with the rules of our world.”
“L-like, um, there’s some kind of system that causes all the passengers to summon a Material without realizing it?”

Blonde Higan nervously looked down at her feet on the wet floor.
She may have been imagining something like an axe murderer hiding under the bed.
“The rumor has a lot of different versions and they’re not all the scary kind. According to some, if you ride a train that begins deadheading, you’ll meet your first love you haven’t seen in forever, your long-dead pet will return to you, or you’ll find a treasure you had lost. All the variations make the entire thing seem less credible, though. There are even some saying you end up in Guam.”
“Oh? You’ll meet your first love? Eh heh heh.”
“Higan?”
Renge grew a little angry, but her sister did not seem to notice.
At any rate…
“Let’s put the tablet in the bag and set that up on the luggage rack to film what happens when the train begins deadheading. We need to pick up on where exactly anything strange occurs between the last station and the switchyard.”
“B-but summoners and vessels don’t show up on cameras and sensors when an Artificial Sacred Ground is set up.”
“Uuh…”
“And to meet the conditions, we have to prepare a ‘napping passenger’.”
“B-but we can’t just skip straight to a human experiment, Higan. We have no idea what’s going to happen.”
“Eh…eh heh heh. Renge, I, um, did my best to help there.”
“What do you mean, Higan?”
“Um, what do you think was in that drink I gave you earlier?”
Higan said something incomprehensible with a smile on her face.
A moment later, Renge felt like the core of her body was shaking.
“Hi…gan…? You didn’t put a sleeping pill in my drink, did you!?”
“Yawn… O-of course I wouldn’t go that far. I just mixed in some allergy medicine that said on the box not to mix it into your tea…mumble…”
“Y-you mean one of the ones full of ingredients that make you drowsy!? The ones that are the bane of long-distance drivers!?”
Renge desperately tried to maintain her consciousness, but the rhythmic shaking of the monorail car quickly robbed her of all ability to resist. It was like trying to use a single hair to support a bowling ball on a slope, so as soon as something small snapped inside her, she could only roll down into the gentle darkness.

“Uuh…”
Meinokawa Renge was awakened by her own voice.
She was surrounded by darkness. Based on the weight and texture, she could tell the notebook-sized tablet was still sitting in her lap. The monorail car was no longer shaking and the monorail seemed to have come to a stop somewhere. All that humidity had vanished and the air felt chilly instead.

“Where am I…? Higan? This is all your fault.”
She complained while pressing the tablet’s power switch with her index finger. The backlight immediately came on and vaguely lit up the entire car. Before, adults in suits had nearly packed it as full as a sardine can, but none of them remained.
There was no one at all there.
And more importantly…
“Wait a minute… Higan?”
She was not there.
The blonde girl who looked just like Renge had vanished from the seat next to her.
“!?”
Renge frantically stood up and looked around, but there was no sign of her “sister” who had been dressed so distinctively. There was no sign of anyone else either and the cold atmosphere seemed to reject all life.
“Higan! Where are you, Higan!?”
Renge’s only light was the tablet which displayed the newspaper letters-to-the-editor section.
That elementary school boy from Toy Dream 35 had said the following:
When people fall asleep on the last train or on a train that begins deadheading, they go missing and never return. But for some reason, the fact that people are vanishing never ends up in the news.

Facts

- Ghosts are beings that, for some reason, cannot continue onto “some other world”. In most cases, the location has been clogged up and they will vanish once that is resolved.
- Anyone closely connected to the summoning ceremony (i.e. summoners, vessels, and Materials) will be forgotten by normal people once they leave their field of vision. The gaps in their memories are filled in with what makes the most sense. But once Normal Person A forgets about the summoner, if the summoner appears before them again, Normal Person A’s memories will return and accumulate for as long as the summoner remains there.
- A summoner cannot set up an Artificial Sacred Ground without binding a contract with a vessel.

- The Rainy Girl ghost was Librarian-chan’s older sister. For some reason, the Rainy Girl is appearing before Librarian-chan and intends to kill her.
- To stop that, Kyousuke bound a contract with Librarian-chan.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke heard the cursed words of “help me”.

Stage 02: Summoners Fight in the Shadows Behind Strange Phenomena

「何故、と問うのはそちらの流儀に反するかな?」

「たった今、お前が気づいた事への口封じだ。

それ以上は答えられない」

(Stage 02 Open 04/30 19:30)

ステージ02

怪異の裏にて召喚師達は暗闘する

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Would it be a violation of your style to ask why?”
“This is to keep you from telling anyone what you just now realized. I can’t say any more than that.”
(Stage 02 Open 04/30 19:30)
Summoners Fight in the Shadows Behind Strange Phenomena

Part ?

Yomikiri Newspaper, 10/22/20XX Edition.
Newspaper clipping of an editorial.
A young life has been lost. Her name was Umie Shouko-chan and she was an eleven year old girl living in Natsumi City. She was attacked by a man on the way back from school and was stabbed nineteen times in the head by a grass sickle.
How can people grow so violent?
The murderer…yes, the paperwork has yet to be completed as his address, occupation, and other identifying information are still unknown, so a name has yet to be revealed in the papers even though an arrest was definitely made. The man was apparently shouting nonsense such as, “They protect the children, they protect the women, they protect the sick, and they protect the old, but who’s going to protect me?” That large man had undergone genetic tuning by an underground doctor in order to leave behind no records, so it must have been strange indeed to see him throwing a tantrum.
When did people grow so very weak?
Why couldn’t he see that as his chance to be a protector?
Taking a life is the most unreasonable act there is. Even if it is taken in a fight over lifeboats and even if there is legal justification, I doubt the people of this world will ever approve of taking someone’s life. If you are willing to take a life to save a life, you must be taught the weight of a life as the guilt weighs on your conscience.
And in cases like this, it will not be rewarded.
Let us at least pray for her happiness in death. And let us pray that heaven really does exist.
Whatever result the human courts reach, that man will never go there. If heaven really does exist, it must be an ideal place where Shouko-chan will be surrounded by nothing but warmth and kindness.
Although that may be nothing more than a selfish wish of us adults who could not make this world into heaven.

Part 2

It was a rainy night.
Countless giant bridges crisscrossed through the air, as if weaving their way through the gaps in the giant buildings. The rain never seemed to end, but the light from projectors reflected off of those raindrops. In addition to the normal decorative lights, giant mascots danced through the night sky. If one leaned over the railing and looked down to the dark sea at the lowest level, they would find it filled with dancing light, as if glow-in-the-dark paint had been dumped into the water.
This was the Rainy Screen campaign.
It was supposed to be a special event to keep guests coming to the amusement park, but to the residents who had to live with it for days on end, the colorful lights and deluge of noise from directional speakers had grown into a horrible nuisance.
According to the clock of light projected on a film of water flowing down a building wall, it was 7:30 PM.
That was when Librarian-chan should have arrived at her “risky job”, but she had not made it due to some trouble.
However, she did not have to worry about her boss being angry with her.
She looked incredibly confused as she held the umbrella and held a cellphone to her ear.
“U-um, like I said, I’m telling you I’m going to be late…”
“I’m not sure what to tell you. Recruit #1077B? …I’ve checked several times now and I can’t find that file.”
“Boss! I worked there last week too.”
“Yes, yes. If you’re trying to claim I messed up so you can work without any paperwork or an interview, it’s not going to work. Adult society isn’t that simple.”
When her boss hung up on her, she stared at the small screen in a daze.
“Didn’t I tell you?” asked Kyousuke with a sigh. “You have to be in their field of vision.”
“…I can’t believe this.”
“If you want, you can try someone from our class, your family, or the police. Try calling whoever you want. I guarantee you not one of them will take you seriously. It’s like you’ve been forgotten by the entire world.”
“…”
Librarian-chan rubbed her thumb across the phone’s buttons.
She hesitated for a bit, but she did not try any of the speed dial numbers.
The boss she had only known for a week had been enough of a shock.

Her heart may have been rejecting the fear of being forgotten and left behind by someone she knew far better than that.
“But the information hasn’t been completely erased or anything. Once you’re directly in their field of vision, they’ll remember it all for as long as you’re there.”
“Then…”
“Are you finally ready to hear about the summoning ceremony?”
Kyousuke doubted any normal person would be able to accept a description of summoners and vessels if it was just suddenly thrown at them.
The fastest method was to actually summon a Material, but that required a one-on-one battle. That is, it was easy to do, but it would mean a fight to death.
On the other hand, safely and surely demonstrating that paranormal world was quite difficult. It was said that you did not even take your first real step into the world of summoning until you could smoothly explain it all.
“Anyway, you don’t have to worry about your job, so I think it would make sense to focus on your sister. Or should I call her the Rainy Girl?”
“You can do something about my sister?”
“As long as we can catch her. We control the beings that lurk beyond the gods, so there’s no way we could lose to a human ghost.”
“…”
Librarian-chan’s face looked pale and thoughtful as it reflected the countless lights in the rain. It almost looked like she herself had become a ghost, left behind by the flow of time.
Kyousuke sighed.
“Your condition is only temporary, so don’t worry about it.”
“Eh? I can go back…to normal?”
“Once this is over, you just have to end your contract with me. Not counting extreme outliers like Lu-san who earned more than 100 Awards as a vessel alone, the supernatural is generally reliant on the summoner. The vessel becomes a normal person again once the contract is gone.”
That meant Kyousuke could not return to normal.
Once they lost sight of him, even a friend or lover would completely forget about him. And that would never change.
And once he died and was buried, no one could ever see him again.
The fact that he had died – no, that he had lived – would be sealed away behind the lid of forgetfulness.
“If you just want to return to normal, we could do it right away. But that would leave your sister’s issue unresolved. You might not know what I mean by the summoning ceremony, but you’ve at least sensed that there’s a ‘strange power’ at work here, right? Separating you from your sister without that would be quite difficult. Can you believe me about that?”
“It’s true I can’t rely on a knife or a gun when my sister’s like that. But I don’t know of any staffs that shoot out fire when you swing them. …This is the only mysterious power I know about.”

She seemed to be speaking to herself more than to Kyousuke.
Stepping past the “common sense” that bordered on science worship was more painful than one would expect.
But it was probably not due to Kyousuke’s way with words that she had been able to do so.
It was due to how cornered she was already feeling.
This had not been her first time to encounter the Rainy Girl, so she had already tried everything she could and discovered first-hand just how fragile “common sense” could be.
So she had stepped past it.
She had let go of the world she had been born to and she had plunged into this world.
“Where should we start?”
“Well.” Kyousuke spoke in his usual tone of voice while holding an umbrella.
“How about we start by binding your body?”
……
Librarian-chan fell silent for a bit.
Then she smiled brightly.
Lastly, an impressive sound burst out into the city night.
A girl’s wholehearted slap contained a special power!!
“Bgh, gbhah!?”
“You’re the worst!! You really are the worst!! Shiroyama-kun, did you think you could take advantage of my situation to do whatever you wanted with me!?”
“N-no, wait. Let me explain…”
“Explain what!? The details of your special ‘proclivities’!?”
With umbrella and school bag in hand, Librarian-chan tightly held her own body, blushed bright red, and snapped back at him.
Kyousuke was a little overwhelmed at being branded a pervert.
“I-in the world of the summoning ceremony, a summoner fights alongside a vessel. You’re that vessel right now, Librarian-chan. But there’s a risk of you summoning vengeful or evil spirits and other things beyond my instructions.”
“…”
Librarian-chan could not have understood even half of what Kyousuke was talking about.
However, the mention of vengeful or evil spirits was enough for her expression to cloud over.
“We need a safety to prevent that. …It can be anything really, as long as it’s a symbol that solidifies your heart. Collars and handcuffs are the most obvious, but it can also be something closely related to your everyday life. There has to be something you use to restrain your actions or desires, right? Like a scale or your skirt’s zipper.”
“Why are your examples focused on my weight and measurements?”

“Because those are pretty common for girl vessels. For example, some use a push up bra, bra pads, or-…gweh!?’
As soon as Kyousuke made his insensitive comment, Librarian-chan acted on behalf of every worrying maiden on the planet by slamming her school bag into his face.
“Sigh. In other words, it can be anything I wear that keeps me focused? I have no idea if it will work, but I suppose it’s worth trying, just like a protective charm or something.”
“Uuh… I made sure to explain everything properly, so why do you have to treat me like this?”
“In that case, hmm. This might work for me.”
Librarian-chan showed Kyousuke her right wrist.
She wore a very, very small wristwatch that’s face was only the size of her little finger’s nail.
“I always wear it when I head out, so it’s the first thing that came to mind when it comes to switching my tension on and off.”
“Then that would be best. Do you have any emotional attachment to it?”
“It cost a fair bit, but not really.”
“Then let’s stop by a clock shop. I want to modify it a little.”
“By adding in a magic charm or something?”
“No, I’ll just swap out the strap. I want to add in the symbolism of the summoner modifying it and giving it to you. That will make sure it works.”
To get the work done, they left the usual path and looked around for the necessary store.
They first tried a brand-name shop that sold all the best clock maker brands, but they gave up when they saw all the zeros on the price tags.
They next tried a repair shop run by an old man and had the watch’s strap replaced with one made from a thin silver chain.
“That completes our preparations. I doubt it will be a problem since you always wear it anyway, but make sure you don’t forget to keep that on. Got that?”
“Understood.”
Librarian-chan rubbed her wrist to check the feel of the new strap.
“But what exactly do we do now? Stay up every night waiting for my sister to show up?”
“We’re going to bring the fight to the Rainy Girl. I don’t know how much truth there is to the rumors, but I recommend changing into clothes you can wear out on a rainy night.”
“Even though everyone will forget about me?”
“They’ll remember if you happen to run into them. And wouldn’t it be best to avoid playing a game of tag with a police officer?”
Just once, Kyousuke checked the surrounding area on his smartphone’s map.
“We’re a bit far from my cruiser, so I’ll go grab a change of clothes from a storage locker near here. You head back to your home and change into

some casual clothes. Try to make it as adult-looking as possible to match the situation.”
With that said, Kyousuke started to leave, but Librarian-chan tugged on his arm.
“Wait,” she said in a weak voice. “Don’t leave me.”
“Summoners and vessels are both ‘removed from the norm’, so we won’t forget each other even if we can’t see each other.”
“That doesn’t matter.” She bit her lip once and finally continued her confession. “I’m scared to be alone ‘here’. Please stay with me.”

Part 3

They dealt with Kyousuke’s errand first.
He picked up a change of clothes from a storage locker near the monorail station and he changed from his uniform and into his usual hoodie.
They then stopped by a student apartment in M Block.
It seemed to be Librarian-chan’s home.
It was located on the 27th floor of an ultra-high rise building towering up from the city. But with the large bridges on either side every five or ten stories, it felt more like being on the second or third floor.
The room was a stereotypical one-room apartment.
That meant she must not have been living with her family.
“Where are your parents?”
“They live somewhere else. …It’s like time stopped for them after my sister died. It was like being surrounded by the awkward silence of an elevator twenty-four hours a day. I just couldn’t stand it, so I used high school as a chance to leave.”
Librarian-chan turned on the lights and grabbed the air conditioner’s remote as she spoke.
“My mom and dad are kind and there isn’t any real problem with them. In fact, I think they’re more loving than in a normal family, even including the amount they give for allowance. But I couldn’t stand it. It was like I was getting everything that should have gone to my sister. They were probably telling me to be happy enough for my sister too, but it was a complicated feeling for me.”
That may have been why she talked about working part-time so often.
She did not want to rely on what should have gone to her sister, so she had decided to live off of money she earned herself.
“…”

Kyousuke glanced over at the table.
A few hard cover books sat there. At school, she had claimed to have only bought two or three books and to borrow the rest from her parents. That suggested their relationship was not entirely cut off and she visited them from time to time.
It was a complicated relationship, but she must not have felt completely cut off from them.
At the very least, she did not want to lose her connection to them. That was obvious from the fear she had felt when faced with the fact that summoners and vessels were so easily forgotten.
Some people who were dissatisfied with their life would actually rejoice when they heard that.
“Do you have a picture of your sister?”
“No.”
As she selected her clothing from the closet, Librarian-chan replied with a self-deprecating smile on her lips.
She walked to the changing room with the clothes in her arms.
“I haven’t been able to face her since that day. That’s why she’s so angry. That’s what I realized when rumors of the Rainy Girl first started showing up on the internet around Japan. I knew people must be seeing her everywhere because she was searching for me with a look of pure rage on her face.”
She disappeared beyond the frosted glass door.
He could tell she was removing her clothing from the movements of her silhouette.
“What kind of person was she?”
“I’m not really sure,” replied a muffled voice in the changing room. “To be honest, I can’t really remember her anymore. And I don’t just mean I’m too scared to remember. Because of how her body ended up, her coffin was empty during the funeral. …That’s all I can remember now. I should have so many memories: when we went to the beach, when we went to festivals, when we stayed up late into the night together, and so on. But there’s just a blank spot there where her face should be. Just that blank emptiness seen through the coffin’s window.”
“…”
Kyousuke narrowed his eyes a little.
(If she knew how the Rainy Girl acted in life and where she generally went, we might have been able to get ahead of her, but this doesn’t sound very hopeful.)
“I see. Then that’s fine.”
“You’re so kind. After the incident, I was surrounded by people asking all sorts of questions.”
The Rainy Girl herself could be annihilated with a single Incense Grenade. It was hard to say if that was truly the best choice, but that was what Librarian-chan wanted.

Which meant…
“Sorry about the wait,” she said after sliding open the frosted glass door.
She wore a tight black shirt, a beige culotte skirt, and thick black tights. Overall, the outfit had a chocolate coloration and it was fairly adult-looking, just as he had requested. Like this, she would not immediately be taken into protective custody.
“I’m ready to head out now, so where are we headed?”
“I want to start by gathering some information.”
“On my sister?”
“That and anything else related to the current situation. *The ghost phenomenon* can be explained with the larger rules of the summoning ceremony. So if a ghost is showing up under unnatural circumstances, the odds are good the rules of the summoning ceremony are being used in some unnatural circumstances. …That means I want to see what that ‘industry’ is up to right now.”
He was not going to get anything out of Librarian-chan, the closest information source to the Rainy Girl herself, so he had to come up with another plan. That was one reason behind his suggestion.
He pulled out his smartphone as he continued.
“Aika and Lu-san. It looks like I’ll have to buy some information from the usual sources. …Although being too indebted to those two could seriously be a matter of life or death.”
He complained as he used his index finger to send a text message to Aika’s apartment. It said he had accepted a new job, he had bound a contract with a vessel, and he was on his way to buy some information.
And there was one more thing.
“Yes. I should probably look into that as well.”
“?”
“Ghosts do occur naturally, but since they’re explained by the summoning ceremony, it’s also possible for a summoner to intentionally cause one. The Rainy Girl herself is definitely your sister, but it bothers me that she started appearing so suddenly. It sounds like the rumors have spread throughout Japan and even to places like Guam and New York, but if we assume it truly started here in Toy Dream 35, it’s worth seeing if a nearby summoner maybe had something to do with this.”
He did not wait for a reply to his message. He had just about turned into Aika’s caretaker, so he had a spare key. Also, that true shut-in and that top-class assassin had no concept of day and night.
“Let’s get going. Knowing Aika, she’ll welcome us as long as we stop by a convenience store and buy her some limited edition chips or something.”
“Come to think of it, I haven’t had anything to eat since I skipped work. Can we buy something on the way?”
They discussed their plans as they left the one-room apartment.
It was still raining outside, but that did not mean the streets were not crowded with pedestrians.

The Rainy Screen may not have been a useless endeavor after all.
The police's anti-juvenile crime team was probably beginning their patrol at this time, but they could still see a few boys and girls wearing the same school uniforms walking across the bridges.
"Huh? Isn't that the student council president?"
"Where?"
"Over there in that crowd."
Librarian-chan pointed over, but Kyousuke could not see any specific person among all the colorful umbrellas.
As he searched, something bumped into his shoulder.
"Hm? What is it, boy? Isn't it a little late for someone with no club activities and no job?"
It was Benikomichi Fuuki.
Their umbrellas audibly pressed against each other.
"And what are you doing here, Senpai?"
"I'm only now heading home, you coldhearted boy. As usual, I had to waste the entire day working things out between those spoiled student council members. Honestly, if you had acted as my human shield, I wouldn't have been dragged back to that boring student council room."
"If you're going to complain, can you at least not ignore the laws of this world as you do so?"
"And after all that, there was some trouble just before leaving. Oh, you probably wouldn't know, but every speaker in the school was blasting static. We had to go around checking them all and we never did figure out what caused it. Sadly, it was about as wasted as wasted effort can be."
"…"
Librarian-chan's shoulders shook at the student council president's exasperated and exhausted comment.
The supernatural phenomenon in her head was now an objective fact and not just a vision she had seen.
That simple fact seemed to peel back the thin layer of common sense from her mind. It seemed like she would have blood oozing from her heart before long.
Benikomichi Fuuki seemed oblivious and continued casually chatting.
"Thanks to that, I suddenly realized it had gotten this late. I won't miss tonight's drama since I can set my digital recorder with my smartphone, but I might have screamed if I couldn't do that."
"I see," said Kyousuke just to have something to say.
However, the president seemed unwilling to say goodbye and leave.
She pressed her umbrella further in against his and gave him an upturned look.
"B-by the way, Shiroyama Boy, I have a request."
"What is it?"

When Kyousuke asked, she used the hand not holding her umbrella to fidget with her long hair by her ear.
“This might ruin your image of an upperclassman, but I’ve never actually walked out in public this late before. I’ve heard rumors that the type of guest at Toy Dream 35 completely changes when all the neon turns on, so I’d really rather not walk around alone at night if I can avoid it…”
“You can’t, Shiroyama-kun!! You promised you’d help me, didn’t you!?”
“Oh, what’s this? You’re a popular guy, Shiroyama Boy. But I’m not going to give in so easily.”
“Wait, wait, stop pulling on my arms! And I dropped my umbrella! I’m getting soaked!”
An outside observer might have been jealous, but the girls were acting out of fear. That meant they did not hold back. Pain raced through his shoulders and he was legitimately concerned his arms would pull right out of the sockets.
And then, with no warning, all sound instantly vanished.
The crowd walking every which way around them was still there and the rain providing constant noise had not vanished.
It was a psychological issue.
As a great number of people crossed the bridge, he heard a sound within the parade of so many lights. He heard it as clearly as a pebble thrown into a cave.
It was a footstep.
“——————”
“Wah! Shiroyama…-kun?”
“What is it, Shiroyama Boy?”
He did not have time to answer. He looked back and saw a short boy standing about fifteen meters away.
The boy was at most twelve. He wore a black shirt and bike shorts as well as a fluorescent yellow helmet and similarly colored elbow and knee protectors. They looked like kids rollerblading gear and the coloration was reminiscent of a hornet’s abdomen.
His eyes did not contain the bright and innocent look one would expect at his age.
The darkness lurking in his eye sockets was that of someone who lived in a world of killing.
“Hi.”
He spoke to Kyousuke.
Immediately afterwards, he pulled something from his back. It resembled a three-sectioned staff, a nunchaku-like weapon of three connected rods, but when the internal wire tightened, it was remade into a long rod.
It was a Blood-Sign.
This was clearly a summoner.
Benikomichi Fuuki knew nothing at all about the summoning ceremony, but even she must have noticed the odd aura surrounding the boy. Or perhaps

without the summoning ceremony as a mental “excuse” or “point of compromise”, her mind worked uselessly and failed to process it.
“Do you…know him?”
The desire for *any answer at all* may have been why she asked that.
But Kyousuke did not look back her way.
He did not want to take his eyes off of this opponent.
“Are you an Illegal assassin? I saw your disgusting handiwork at the international airport.”
“Even if you don’t know why, surely you know where this is headed. A killer was sent out to kill, and here I am to do just that.”
If this assassin was from their industry, he would not have been sent out for something unrelated to the summoning ceremony.
But at the same time, it would not be a continuation of the airport occupation surrounding that attache case. Thanks to Lu Niang Lan, Kyousuke had been taken out of that fight partway through. It had all ended just how Illegal had wanted, so he doubted they would do anything to him now.
He also could not imagine it was related to the issue Alice (with) Rabbit was working on. He had only just bound his contract with Librarian-chan, so that would not have any connection to that industry.
With one exception.
Namely, the Rainy Girl who was connected to Librarian-chan and could be explained within the rules of the summoning ceremony.
(We’re investigating the Rainy Girl, we stopped by Librarian-chan’s apartment, and we’re taking this route to Aika’s apartment. Where did he pick up on that information?)
After some thought, he easily found the answer.
Their communications had been intercepted.
However, the problem would not be with Kyousuke’s smartphone or Aika’s computer. A professional would focus on the flow of information more than the average person. More importantly, there was a simpler and more realistic answer.
(Had he already set something up in the Librarian-chan’s apartment and the surrounding cellphone towers? That way he could have stolen my message inside the relay hardware. …That would mean he’s been monitoring anyone connected to the Rainy Girl for a while.)
But that was all he knew.
Illegal was a collection of about 330 criminal organizations.
This assassin belonged to that group and he would supply professional violence for anyone who paid an appropriate sum, so why would he be fixated on a ghost like the Rainy Girl? Kyousuke had no way of figuring that out.
The only path to revealing the answer was to fight.
“Would it be a violation of your style to ask why?”

“This is to keep you from telling anyone what you just now realized. I can’t say any more than that.”
Just as he gave his answer, the wall of the building behind the small assassin exploded and crumbled.
Pieces of concrete larger than bricks poured down. They collided with the glass of a monorail passing by nearby and the monorail rapidly braked, creating a row of orange sparks and a screeching noise. Quite a few umbrellas were broken and people screamed as they fled in every direction.
They were all driven by the identical desire to escape as quickly as possible, but they pulled at each other’s legs as they tried to push forward.
Kyousuke immediately reached behind himself to pull out the Repliglass Blood-Sign coiled there.
But a hand tugged on his arm.
It was Benikomichi Fuuki’s as her face grew pale with fear.
“Wh-what was that!? Did that boy do that? B-but…ah wah wah wah wah wah wah wah! The police…we need to get down…um, we need to do something…!”
“————————”
Meanwhile, the assassin lifted the corners of his mouth in a smile and raised his Blood-Sign.
He moved the tip from Kyousuke’s face and aimed it at Benikomichi Fuuki instead.
As soon as he saw that, Kyousuke swept the nearby president’s feet out from under her to knock her to the ground. At the same time, he took a step forward and pulled an Incense Grenade from his hoodie.
Only after completing the series of actions did his mind realize why he had taken them.
——Yes, why did he need an Incense Grenade?
To set up an Artificial Sacred Ground.
——What did it mean if an Artificial Sacred Ground had yet to be set up?
The environment was not yet prepared for summoning a Material.
——Then where was the assassin boy’s vessel? It was true that building’s wall had crumbled, but had a Material really done that?
It happened a moment later.
Suddenly, a dull impact struck him from behind.
He looked over his shoulder and saw a large pair of sewing scissors stabbed into the center of his back.
He looked up at who held them down at their hip with both hands.
It was Student Council President Benikomichi Fuuki.

Part 4

An unpleasant scraping sound was audible even from outside his body.
The glasses and braid girl that Shiroyama Kyousuke called Librarian-chan did not understand what had happened before her eyes.
Based on what Kyousuke had said, the short boy standing in their way was a summoner.
And that boy had something to do with the building wall being blown away.
But who was the student council president if she was assisting the summoner?
If she was his helper, did that make her a vessel, just like the girl?
That seemed like the most sensible answer, but then some things did not add up.
Yes.
Benikomichi Fuuki was a high school's student council president.
If, like Kyousuke and the girl now, she was forgotten as soon as she stepped outside one's field of vision, a discrepancy would crop up somewhere, but nothing had seemed off before.
But at the same time, Kyousuke was also easily forgotten. So even if a normal person was helping the enemy summoner, they would forget about their target. That would prevent a planned attack.
So when it came down to it, what was Benikomichi Fuuki?
Was she a vessel or a normal person?
"So…that's it," said Kyousuke with the scissors still stabbed deep into his back. "As long as you…follow the necessary procedure, a summoner and vessel's contract can be reworked at will. And any pair awards are generally managed by the summoner."
He was answered by a breath of laughter.
Benikomichi Fuuki looked overjoyed as she practically leaned up against Kyousuke's back.
"That's right, Shiroyama Boy. Just cancel the contract and the vessel becomes a normal human once more. And then people won't forget about you."
"Were you…repeatedly binding and releasing the contract…at intervals of five or ten minutes?"
"What if we were?"
"Rebinding the contract is possible, but no one knows exactly how it works or how safe it is. Who knows what kind of side effects will show up later on…"
"Still, it allowed us to safely defeat Freedom Award 903, Alice (with) Rabbit. Don't you think that will extend our lives a lot, lot longer than any eventual side effects could counteract?"
"I…see."
Kyousuke took a shallow, shallow breath.
And then…
"If that was the plan, then I've got bad news."
His voice was low.

A moment later, a cloud of doubt appeared on Benikomichi Fuuki's face as she held the sewing scissors.
With a dull sensation, intense pressure reached the blade buried in his body. Push or pull, they would not budge. Not even a single millimeter. It felt like they were caught in a gap inside a giant boulder.
"What!? This can't possibly all be human muscle!!"
"Of course it isn't."
A tremendous force hit the scissors and they were knocked from the president's hands. As they flew up into the air, the back of Kyousuke's hoodie split vertically. The sewing scissors spun through the air, over the bridge's railing, and down into the sea. The torn hoodie fluttered in the wind.
Only then did Benikomichi Fuuki catch on.
She had not stabbed Kyousuke's back.
"It was a Repliglass Blood-Sign!?"
"Sorry, but it's usually coiled up on my back. You could shoot me from behind with a handgun and it wouldn't kill me."
"You'd caught on from the start and intentionally lured me in? No, it couldn't be that simple!!"
"No, I'm not about to claim I'd figured everything out. I had my doubts, but I still tried to protect you. You tricked me just fine."
Kyousuke did not try to show off.
He did not need to.
"But my body moved on its own while my mind was hesitating. I was probably searching out every possibility at some deep, subconscious level. For example, wasn't it odd for you to appear just before this happened?"
Even as he spoke, Kyousuke was taking his next action.
His elbow shot back and mercilessly struck the president in the gut.
"Gah…ah!?"
Her sexy body doubled over as she gasped for breath. This time, he sent his Blood-Sign back to fill in the slight gap created between them. The tip flew like a bullet to knock her unconscious.
She had trouble breathing, but the president still managed a shout.
"…Hayato!!"
That was the magic word.
As soon as she said it, Kyousuke's aim was thrown off.
Benikomichi Fuuki had nearly been clinging to him, but her presence suddenly vanished. However, she did not seem to have any special physical abilities like Lu Niang Lan. And a normal high school girl should not have been able to avoid Kyousuke's attack.
Then what had made it possible?
The answer was simple.
The assassin summoner named Hayato really had thrown an Incense Grenade this time.

In addition to setting up an Artificial Sacred Ground, it automatically called the summoner and vessel over to the point of detonation.
“Tch!!”
Kyousuke clicked his tongue and rotated the Blood-Sign in his hand to immediately shift from a martial arts stance to a summoning ceremony one.
The two enemies were leaning up against one another.
The summoner was the assassin named Hayato and the vessel was Student Council President Benikomichi Fuuki.
The three-dimensional Rose created from the 216 Petals was already floating between Kyousuke and Hayato. The initial three White Thorns floated in front of them.
“This is perfect. Librarian-chan! It’s time I showed you just what we can do in the summoning ceremony. You can learn how to be a vessel while we fight!!”
“Eh, eh!? We’re going to fight her? Really!? What do you mean fight!? But, um, that’s the student council president...!”
“I don’t know why, but they’ve decided they can’t let us investigate the Rainy Girl any further and are here to stop us. There’s some information there they want to keep hidden even if it means killing someone. If we don’t break through this, we can’t reach the truth. So let’s go, Librarian-chan!!”

Part 5

They were surrounded by the solid sounds of hard objects striking each other.
The Rose was a three-dimensional shape made from the 216 Petals.
Kyousuke and Hayato simultaneously launched White Thorns as if to crush the Rose from either side. The White Thorns left a laser beam-like trail behind and instantly smashed the Rose to pieces. The low sound, middle sound, high sound, and lowest sound Petals scattered in every direction and bounced wildly around on all the obstacles: the ground, the streetlights, the edges of the Artificial Sacred Ground, etc.
As soon as the Rose was smashed, countless holes known as Spots opened around the Artificial Sacred Ground.
They were dark, fist-sized holes opened in space itself. They looked like miniature black holes and the ricocheting Petals were sucked into them.
As they fell into the Spots, they were added to a summoner’s stock.
“Librarian-chan!!”
“Fuuki-san!!”

They both cried out as the vessel girls changed form.
Librarian-chan's silhouette spiraled around and she became a giant mass of sticky yellow liquid three meters tall that weighed seven hundred kilograms. It had a cost of one high sound. Known as the Original Yellow (s), it was one of the most basic Materials.
Meanwhile, Benikomichi Fuuki became a similar mass of sticky green liquid. It had a cost of one middle sound and it was known as the Original Green (k).
Everything could grow infinitely from there.
Depending on how things developed, this could lead to the Divine or even Unexplored-class. It was frightening to think of, but even the White Queen, strongest of the strong, was no exception.
(In the three-way stalemate of sound range, I have the advantage. If he's skilled enough to easily reach the Divine-class, it might be best to finish this before he can build up his Material too much. If I can continue predicting what he'll do next, I can keep my sound range advantage and crush him with that!!)
With that in mind, Kyousuke thought of a few different Materials and the evolutionary tree that branched out from them. He instantly grasped the locations of all the Petals and Spots scattered throughout the Artificial Sacred Ground and accurately calculated out what rails his White Thorns would follow after he hit them.
But…
"Yes, I know that, Fuuki-san."
Hayato muttered to himself as he held a mental conversation with the president.
"You are my mistress. As always, you just do what you want. I'll make sure it all works out."
A moment later, the battle began.
However, it did not start with the yellow and green goo clashing at the midpoint between each other.
The Original Green that Benikomichi Fuuki had become, mercilessly smashed the giant bridge.
Kyousuke and Librarian-chan immediately sank down.
Gravity was pulling them.
Their footing crumbled, but as a summoner, Shiroyama Kyousuke immediately saw what they were after.
"You…!!"
"Ha ha. That's right!!"
The summoning ceremony contained the following rules:
The Artificial Sacred Ground is set up once an Incense Grenade is used.
The Artificial Sacred Ground is set up relative to the "contact surface" when the Incense Grenade detonates.

Thus, it can be set up relative to a wall or ceiling rather than the floor or ground. In that case, the summoners and Materials will ignore gravity and stick to the wall or ceiling.
But what happened if the Artificial Sacred Ground's "contact surface" was destroyed?
The answer was simple:
The Artificial Sacred Ground will be reconstructed based on the next "contact surface" stepped on by the summoner who set up the Artificial Sacred Ground.
If that is a wall or ceiling, the direction of the artificial gravity will change to match.
In that case, unlike when the Incense Grenade detonates, the opponent summoner and vessel will also be pulled toward the new gravitational direction.
As he fell, Assassin Boy Hayato forced his feet onto the building wall as if stomping onto it.
A moment later, the direction of Kyousuke and the Original Yellow's fall greatly changed.
They fell toward the building wall.
Unable to land properly, they collided with the wall.
<Kyah!?>
"Librarian-chan, abandon your human senses! Right now, not even a sword or bullet could hurt you!!"
<What, what!? What is this!? What is happening to me? Why am I surrounded in this sticky stuff…? No, is this my body!? What is going on!?>
Her problem was a much more fundamental one.
Even if she liked fairy tales, it was not so easy to accept the real thing so suddenly.
Meanwhile, the situation was already underway. The many Petals floating around the old Artificial Sacred Ground poured down into the new one as if they had been struck by a giant hand. They bounced around wildly even without any interference from a Blood-Sign and White Thorn.
Hayato targeted them and accurately launched his White Thorn.
Before Kyousuke could get up and pursue this new turn of events, Benikomichi Fuuki's Original Green smashed the building wall as well.
He did not even have time to regain his balance.
Each time they fell, collided, and created a new surface, the Material would destroy the new "contact surface" after only a few seconds. Each time, Kyousuke, Librarian-chan, and the many Petals were pulled around with the moving Artificial Sacred Ground. It felt like being attached to an invisible chain and flailed around as a human morning star.
"…!!"
The Material's body was incredibly tough and the summoner was surrounded by a protective circle, so this was not enough to kill them.

But being swung around so constantly cost Kyousuke any chance to aim and launch a White Thorn.
The simplest shot in the summoning ceremony was to place a straight line between the White Thorn, the Petal, and the Spot and then to hit the center of the White Thorn with the Blood-Sign for a shot with no spin.
That way, the Petal would only travel in a straight line.
Even a rookie could easily build up their Material like that, but it was completely unusable in this situation.
Each time the Artificial Sacred Ground changed, all of the Petals were pulled with it and began bouncing around wildly. Unlike a stopped Petal, a moving Petal would deviate from the direction in which the White Thorn hit it. That required taking two vectors into consideration when launching the White Thorn.
And that was while the artificial gravity constantly moved to the walls or ceiling to swing the summoner around.
Whether or not they knew in advance where the stage would move created an unavoidable gap in reaction speed. And that lag led to a definite difference in Material development.
They spread destruction for that reason alone.
They destroyed the city, the scenery, people's homes, and the places of rest for complete strangers.
Again and again, they could be heard landing on new surfaces.
At the moment, Kyousuke and the others were inside a giant office. Thick columns were lined up horizontally like log bridges and they each landed on different ones.
Petals no one had touched fell into Spots on their own and fruitlessly vanished.
Countless steel desks and wheeled chairs were lined up vertically.
The bottom of the valley below them was a group of shattered windows.
Their Materials had changed again and again as time passed.
Kyousuke's was the Greedy Demon-Devouring Spider (nu – wm – ei – lvz – fc – o – zi).
Cost: 14. Sound Range: High.
It was a brutal, three meter spider colored red and black. Rather than spinning a web for an indirect attack, it directly attacked its prey and injected digestive fluids with its fangs to melt the enemy Material from within.
Hayato's was the Ugly and Pitiful Insect Swollen with Tragedy that Eats into the Void (lu – ei – map – ab – ou – od – nu – mel – o – yi).
Cost: 21. Sound Range: Middle.
It looked like a caterpillar larger than a car. Each time that incarnation of hunger wriggled and greedily moved its mouth, it ate into the scenery like it was biting into a leaf.
<N-now I'm mad.>
Librarian-chan's voice reached the back of Kyousuke's mind.

Her tone was distorted and she still seemed confused, but she must have seen something she simply could not accept.
<Now that I think about it, she didn't hesitate to stab someone in the back and now they're making a mess of the city for their own convenience… Do they think anything goes if no one gets mad and everyone forgets about them? I can't just ignore someone who would probably kill someone with that flimsy reasoning!!>
The core of that cry may have overlapped with her family issue.
The dead monster that had become the Rainy Girl had once been her sister.
After having her family so unfairly taken from her, she could not overlook that same sort of unfairness here. And that emotion brought enough anger to overpower the confusion and fear of becoming one with an incomprehensible monster.
<What do I have to do? Shiroyama-kun, tell me what I need to do to defeat them!!>
"Just maintain that spirit. Hold the reins of the Material's mind and imagine you're pointing its targeting cursor directly at your opponent! Then the monster will attack that opponent on its own!!"

Part 6

In the artificial gravity control strategy, one repeatedly destroyed the Artificial Sacred Ground's "footing" and frequently moved between the walls and the ceiling.
Assassin Summoner Hayato was using that strategy as a means of obstructing his opponent's growth rather than building up his own Material.
Figuring out the trick did not give his opponent a solution.
First, using the Blood-Sign and White Thorns to build up a Material was as mentally taxing as sniping. When the artificial gravity's direction was constantly changing and the summoner was being swung around every which way, there was no way they could focus.
Second, all of the Petals moved to new locations each time the Artificial Sacred Ground changed. Hitting moving Petals into the Spots was far more difficult than with stopped Petals.
Plus, the Artificial Sacred Ground's footing was always established relative to the summoner who had started the battle.
Even if Kyousuke destroyed their footing, the next Artificial Sacred Ground would still be established relative to the surface Hayato stood on, so he could not copy his enemy's technique.

That meant Hayato always knew whether the next footing would be on the floor, the wall, or the ceiling.
The summoner and Petals moved in relation to him, so he could begin his calculations before making his move.
Hayato could prepare and focus while Kyousuke had to react after being swung around and that recovery time created a slight lag. As that accumulated, it affected his skill with the Blood-Sign. The gap in Material development speed grew to dangerous levels.
But even in this situation, Kyousuke kept fighting back against the assassin. He continually switched to the sound range that allowed him to make up for the growing gap in cost.
But even that would not last forever.
Once the cost gap grew to 10, the difference in sound range could be overpowered with brute strength.
(The current cost gap is averaging to about 5. I'm always out ahead and he can't turn this around now.)
Sometimes on the office's round columns, sometimes on the windows, sometimes on the underside of a giant bridge between buildings, and sometimes on the side of high rise buildings, Hayato moved from footing to footing while swinging around the Alice (with) Rabbit pair. The lines of red Petals chased after them like a group of tail lights.
Each move left the area wrapped in serious damage, but he did not care about that.
The assassins did not sneak through the shadows to do their work.
When a crime occurred, people grew angry. Wars created even longer and more powerful chains of hatred. But could people feel anger when faced with a natural disaster that utterly surpassed human understanding?
The answer was no.
When the destruction was on too great a scale, people were robbed of the normal emotions. By using beings of another world to kill, they had already entered that realm. So once Hayato and Benikomichi Fuuki used the summoning ceremony, there was nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, and no way of dodging the issue. As if showing off that otherworldly majesty, they would wield its fury until their objective was complete.
So any who stood before them would be crushed by those jaws.
Even if it was Freedom Award 903, Alice (with) Rabbit.
Except…
"…What?"
Hayato expressed some slight confusion as he used Benikomichi Fuuki's power to break horizontally through three high rise building's worth of windows and land on the side of the rail to a roller coaster that was going unused due to the rainy weather.
He had yet to defeat Shiroyama Kyousuke's Material.
He had yet to pass a cost gap of 10.
In fact…

(How is he catching up…!?)
Kyousuke had the Wind-Consuming and Obstacle-Crushing Horse (va – ei – lvz – km – ei – ox – cec – uy).
Cost: 18. Sound Range: High.
As its name suggested, it was a rampaging horse as large as a train car. Its method of attack was simple: it simply charged straight ahead and leveled anything in its path.
Hayato had the Pitiable Doll Covered in Spikes of Hatred (jok – bf – ei – md – a – xov – wuz – r – mel – oq).
Cost: 22. Sound Range: Middle.
It was a life-sized doll fully bound by chains and with countless metal spikes stabbing into it. The monster used the power of blood to fire out the spikes so it could take as many people as possible along with it to the grave.
(Why is the cost gap shrinking?)
Kyousuke had the Man-Eating Stuffed Animal Swollen with Innocent Darkness (mul – o – iu – ou – dhc – weq – ei – lvz – a – icg).
Cost: 23. Sound Range: Low.
A giant shredded stuffed animal had reddish darkness rather than cotton bursting from the ripped cloth. Instead of biting or tearing, it swallowed its target into its belly and contaminated them.
Hayato had the Scorching Killer Smile in a Vortex of Purple Electricity (kub – miq – a – sx – wzb – mu – ou – vew – l – a – zfc).
Cost: 24. Sound Range: High.
A neon bluish-purple light appeared directly in space itself and formed a giant smile over ten meters across. Anyone who touched it or even carelessly approached would be fried.
It was gradual, but the gap between their Materials' costs was closing. Plus, Kyousuke was always maintaining the sound range that gave him an advantage over Hayato.
At this rate, Hayato would be the one having trouble.
In fact…
(Will he catch up? No, could he even pass me? But I'm the one creating our footing, so he should be playing catch up.)
Even now, the world seemed to be spinning around and around as their footing moved to new walls, floors, and ceilings. Each time they moved to a building, bridge, attraction rail, or pillar, all of the preconditions crumbled away.
Before even thinking about landing, it should have been difficult to make any sense of one's shaken vision. And yet…
"It's simple."
Kyousuke raised his Blood-Sign and spoke as if he had read Hayato's mind. And he landed on the new footing almost more nimbly than Hayato, the supposed master of this place.
"It's just like the long jump or the high jump. The athletes don't start preparing for their landing only after making their jump. They determine

how to position their body before the jump and even before the approach run. They only start moving after deciding on their target."
"You don't mean…"
"Your breathing, the movement of your eyes, the tension in your muscles, the adjustments to your balance… All the information I needed *was right there in your body.* All I had to do was read that and I knew when and where the next footing would be."
In a world turned 90 degrees on its side, Kyousuke and Hayato landed on streetlight and a traffic light poles.
"And the calculations for the moving Petals are simple too. …I just have to think of it from a starting point of 45 degrees. If I hit a moving Petal at a right angle with a White Thorn moving at the exact same speed, the Petal will continue at a diagonal angle of 45 degrees. That's an easier calculation than determining the position of the sun with the hands of your watch."
That was nonsense.
It was nothing more than a theoretical value. If he did not perfectly hit the center of the Petal or if either one had even a slight spin to it, the Petal would veer off course.
But Kyousuke had actually done it.
He had the power needed to do so.
But Hayato could not accept it.
(That just means he's intercepting my behavior patterns to predict our footing and the movement of the Petals. Even if he could catch up like that, he couldn't pass me.)
"No, wait."
The assassin boy looked down at his own feet.
He finally grasped something as he stared at the traffic light pole that had become something like a log bridge.
(Is this like shogi or chess? I get to choose our next footing, but my choices aren't unlimited. I have to create the Artificial Sacred Ground relative to *where I next place my feet*, so I can't use any location I can't reach on the first step.)
Which meant…
(The summoner's location, the cost and sound range of the Materials, and the terrain conditions… If you could accurately analyze all that, you could create a tree diagram of the possible courses we could take. Then this wouldn't be the same as a highly random game of rock paper scissors. So… did he…see through all of that?)
"Is something the matter?"
Hayato heard a voice.
He heard the voice of a summoner who had likely predicted their next footing before the assassin boy himself had.
"Did you figure something out this late in the game?"
"Ha…ha ha."
Hayato laughed.

At that point, he had already lost most of his advantage.
Kyousuke had the Shark King that Swims through the Ocean of the Void in a Vortex of Purple Electricity (kub – miq – sx – lu – a – hf – ei – tok – enl – a – vjz).
Cost: 25. Sound Range: Middle.
A man-eating shark the size of a semi truck swam freely through the air. Each time its razor-sharp teeth bit down, bluish-white sparks flew and the target was thoroughly shredded with extreme temperatures exceeding those of an arc welder.
Hayato had the Sharp Shockwave Wings that Blow Away All that Oppose Them (du – vo – a – cuw – bf – ei – zix – nal – me – a – qi – a – fd).
Cost: 26. Sound Range: Low.
A giant bizarre bird had eight wings arranged in a circle like propellers. When it flapped those wings, shockwaves scattered through the entire surrounding area and the shockwaves focused in on a single point to crush the enemy like light gathered by a concave mirror.
The cost gap was almost entirely gone.
Hayato had the disadvantage as far as the sound range was concerned. Given the situation, he would soon be caught up and surpassed on the cost front as well. It was just like a cup filled so full the surface tension was at its limit. Once the collapse began, there was no going back. It would all be over.
More than nine minutes had already passed.
An Artificial Sacred Ground created by an Incense Grenade lasted around ten minutes on average. There were only a few dozen seconds left, but even that felt like an eternity. Each and every second seemed to stretch out infinitely with a sense of death and defeat.
But…
“Did you think this was all I had?”
“If you’ve got another trick up your sleeve, I’d hurry it up. You don’t have much time left.”
“That’s exactly what I’ll do.”
With those words, the Material that Benikomichi Fuuki had fused with dropped down and violently broke the traffic light pole Hayato stood on.
The footing was lost, so the Artificial Sacred Ground sought its next surface. That was the same as before, but something was different.
“…?”
Kyousuke’s eyebrows moved a little.
At first, he may not have been able to predict what Hayato was doing. That was hardly surprising.
A moment later, the Material took a U-turn and struck Hayato’s airborne body from below.
The summoner was contained inside the protective circle, so he was not crushed.

Hayato shot upwards like a ball hit by a metal bat. As he did, he placed his feet on one of the streetlights that were evenly spaced along a vertical line. He was about five hundred meters away.
However…
(Since the Material hit me, I was moving far faster than a human's falling speed. So what happens now that I created a new Artificial Sacred Ground?)
The answer was readily apparent.
(You'll be *forcibly accelerated* when the wall of the new Artificial Sacred Ground slams into you. This goes far beyond a trampoline. You'll be thrown like you stepped onto a catapult.)
This was his secret technique.
It was his vertical launching tactic.
After a short delay, Kyousuke caught up to Hayato
And the many Petals came with him.
Kyousuke had not just fallen upwards. He had been thrown nearly to the top of the new Artificial Sacred Ground like he had been stuffed into a cannon and fired.
Unlike Hayato, Kyousuke had no footing.
That was a simple but crucial difference.
Even if he was a summoner who controlled Materials from another world and wielded their paranormal power, it was still based in the physical actions of using the Blood-Sign. The ability to plant one's feet on the ground and use their body's full strength made all the difference. Using all the muscles in the body and rotating the hips to throw a ball was far more powerful and accurate than only using the strength of the hands. This was the same.
Hayato raised his Blood-Sign as if targeting Kyousuke up in the air. He thrust the tip forward.
There was still a risk of Kyousuke catching up or surpassing him, but that was only a possibility. As things were, Hayato still had the upper hand. So he would end the current trend. He would nip that possibility in the bud before Kyousuke actually caught up.
His opponent would be unable to build up his Material properly while tossed up to the top of the Artificial Sacred Ground and while the footing changed yet again.
The damage would build up during that time.
Hayato's Material could completely crush Kyousuke's in its jaws.
"Let's end this, Freedom. This is an assassin's job."
But then a change came over Shiroyama Kyousuke after being blasted up into the sky. He quickly twisted around and rotated like a gymnast. It was not at all the same as pathetically flailing his limbs around. He must have been helping his own body's spin because there was a clear "axis" to it.
Even now, he maintained his stability.
For an instant, his gaze pierced Hayato.
"It…can't be…"

Tension ran through the assassin boy's body as he stood on the streetlight pole.
Sweat covered the palm holding his Blood-Sign.
(He's still fighting even now? He plans to accurately launch his White Thorns!?)
Deafening sounds crossed paths like nearby lightning strikes.
They were Kyousuke and Hayato. They both used their Blood-Signs to powerfully launch a White Thorn.
Would Kyousuke catch up or would Hayato pull out ahead?
That question went unanswered.
The Artificial Sacred Ground suddenly vanished.
Ten minutes had passed. The time was up.
Their bizarrely shaped Materials returned to being lovely girls. At the same time, gravity returned to the proper direction.
Hayato and Benikomichi Fuuki slid down and landed on a giant bridge.
But Kyousuke and his vessel had moved out past the bridge, so they fell down between the high-rise buildings. They would likely slip past the countless crisscrossing bridges and reach the ocean at the very bottom.
Benikomichi Fuuki spoke as she placed her hands on the railing and peered down into the dark ocean far below.
"So we failed to finish him off."
"Should we pursue them, mistress?"
"No, we've used up the advantage of a surprise attack. If we're going to kill him, we need to plan everything out from scratch. We aren't looking for a fair fight. An assassin searches for a surefire way to kill their target."

Part 7

A girl's high-pitched scream burst out.
"…"
Kyousuke spread out his arms and legs like a skydiver to increase his air resistance and moved horizontally to avoid the many levels of bridges. A single hit would mean instant death. However, Librarian-chan fell right past him in a tailspin.
She had not kept her balance.
At this rate, she would hit one of the bridges.
When he saw that, Kyousuke made a change of plans.
He brought his arms and legs together to make a single line out of his body. This lowered air resistance as much as possible and boosted the speed of

his fall. Aware of the risk, he dove head-first toward the earth in an attempt to catch up to Librarian-chan.
He grabbed her arm.
He swung his arms and legs to spin them around.
The two of them passed just twenty centimeters from the railing of a bridge and continued plummeting toward the water below.
The dark ocean surface approached.
The water parted and Kyousuke heard the ear-splitting roar of a splash taller than he was.
He immediately started for the surface, but then he saw Librarian-chan floating like seaweed.
Hitting the water had knocked her unconscious.
He grabbed her again and swam toward the surface.
Once his head finally broke the surface, he filled his lungs with oxygen.
“Librarian-chan? Librarian-chan!!”
“Uh…ah…?”
Her groans changed to intense coughing as she came to.
“Cough, cough, cough!! Wh-what in the world is going on…?”
“We lost them for the time being, but we can’t relax just yet. Let’s use some building or another to get back up and lose them for real. If they keep attacking, it’ll just wear us down.”
“Who…was that?”
“An assassin from our industry. That much seems certain.”
“What does someone so dangerous have to do with my sister’s ghost?”
“I don’t know. But that interference has changed the situation somewhat.”
“?”
“At any rate, we need to find a safe route and get to Aika’s apartment. We need as much information as we can get.”

Part 8

But first, they were soaking wet.
It had been raining on and on in and around Toy Dream 35, so a fair number of people were wet after forgetting their umbrella or having it stolen while they were inside a store. The problem was how they smelled of seawater.
On top of that, Shiroyama Kyousuke’s hoodie had been torn in the battle.
Even if they would be forgotten soon enough, it meant the end of his humanity if he stopped caring if he gathered an embarrassing sort of attention.

As an adolescent high school boy, he could not allow himself to shamelessly walk around the city while defenselessly exposed and soaking wet.
So…
“Phew. It’s times like these when these storage lockers really come in handy.”
“Um, Shiroyama-kun. Why do you have so many identical hoodies and pants?”
“Oh, this isn’t an obsession or anything. These are the most common models from this company. So if another summoner happens to see me on the job, I don’t have to worry as much about them identifying me by my clothing. … Although it’s a relatively small industry, so it isn’t a huge help.”
“But what about a change of clothes for me?”
“Do you really think I own girl’s clothing?”
When he answered her question with a question of his own, she grabbed his ear and dragged him to a nearby laundromat.
She then made a demand while in her soaking wet clothing.
“Shiroyama-kun, take off your hoodie and hand it over.”
“Now you’re essentially mugging me!?”
“I have to wash and dry these clothes! That will take about an hour altogether, so are you telling me to stand around naked that entire time!? So just take that off already!! C’mon, strip!!”
“Stop, wait! Mhh, mhh!”
Before Kyousuke could protest too much, Librarian-chan stole his hoodie.
The summoner held his body and trembled while she made yet another demand.
“Okay, Shiroyama-kun. Turn around 180 degrees and don’t you turn back around until I say you can.”
“I’m cold… I’m going to catch cold like this…”
“A girl is about to strip with nothing to hide behind! You’re supposed to be blushing!!”
He waited as instructed and heard a wet sound behind him. The wet clothing must have clung to her skin because he heard occasional breaths of struggle.
After he heard one of the washing machines along the wall running, Librarian-chan made an announcement.
“You can turn around now.”
He did so and saw Librarian-chan wearing his hoodie. He could see her white thighs almost all the way up to the base, more than one washing machine was running, and one of them was set to the stockings and underwear mode, so she apparently truly was naked except for the hoodie.
When she sat on the bench next to topless Kyousuke, the scene gained a somehow criminal feel and it was incredibly awkward. But even if summoners could not be punished by the usual rules, he disciplined himself with his own policies!

Librarian-chan sat there like a substitute athlete warming the bench and she watched her clothing spinning beyond the transparent lid.
She had undone her braid, so her hair was wavy and wet. She had also removed her glasses, so she looked quite different from normal. It only made her look more refined.
“Shiroyama-kun, are you always doing things like this?”
“N-no. I have to admit I don’t often have my clothes stolen by my vessel.”
“Not that.”
Librarian-chan faced the washing machines and swung her white feet.
“Are you always, um, how should I put it? Causing trouble like that?”
She may have been reluctant to use the word “fight” in reference to reality.
Kyousuke sighed.
“Did it scare you to become one with the Material?”
“It did, but more importantly…”
She briefly hesitated to continue.
“I think it really freaked me out that everyone would forget about me. I mean, if they can forget about me, that means the world can get on just fine without me. …It’s almost like I’m looking at a world where I died and am no longer a part of it.”
She may have seen it that way due to her sister.
The Rainy Girl.
“Does it not scare you, Shiroyama-kun?”
“I’m used to it.”
“Do you ever want to return to the way things were before?”
“I’m still going to school just fine ‘like this’.”
He was Freedom Award 903.
Once someone reached 1000, they would become one of the gods rather than a part of mankind and they would become the protagonist of a new legend as a resident of *the other side*.
But there was no point in bringing that up here.
Librarian-chan only wanted to do something about her sister and Kyousuke was not driven by such an obvious desire.
This was smaller than that.
It was the story of two people who were willing to risk their lives for something like this.
“School, hm?”
“It’s only been a day, but that seems so far away now. Shiroyama-kun, do you never get bored looking at the textbooks? I get the feeling you could look at it all and decide it’s worthless to you. *And you would actually mean it, unlike the people who use it as an excuse.*”
“No, not really.”
On this alone, Kyousuke did not hesitate even a second to answer.
“I’m just some brat who hasn’t even lived two full decades, so what do I know about the world? I still trust that I at least have enough sense left to remember that.”

Or perhaps it was the world that he wanted to trust in.
Was the miniature garden of the school a symbol of that?
Since he would be forgotten as soon as anyone looked away, he could never pass a real entrance exam and get into the school. Even if he scored a perfect 100, no one would remember it. Since he was still attending high school, he had to have used some kind of special method and that alone showed just how attached to the school he was.
Librarian-chan squeezed the sleeves of the hoodie in her hands and smiled a little as she spoke.
“I’m glad you aren’t a robotic kind of person.”
“Humans aren’t that strong. You learn that all too well when you’ve been a summoner for long enough.”
For example, Aika had been so badly hurt when everyone forgot about her that she had given up on holding any hope in the outside world.
For example, Lu Niang Lan’s life had been dragged around by her great skill and she could no longer escape Illegal.
For every one of them, life was a struggle.
The more superior any of them looked from the outside, the more twisted they truly were.
“The president was pretty incredible too…” said Librarian-chan.
That girl had stabbed someone in the back with sewing scissors and accepted in a monster as a vessel.
Not even Kyousuke knew where Benikomichi Fuuki’s true nature lay. She might have been like that from the moment she was born or there may have been a major turning point in her life. But Librarian-chan seemed to think it was taking a step into this industry that had done it.
“Was it not a shock to you, Shiroyama-kun? You seemed to get along pretty well at school.”
“We…got along?”
“It at least looked that way.”
Librarian-chan actually looked surprised by Kyousuke’s response.
But that may have had less to do with his relationship with the girl and more to do with his inability to judge how close he was to other people.
Finally, he answered her question.
“It was a surprise, I suppose.”
“If it was a shock, then it means you did get along.”
“…I see.”
“Does it not upset you?”
“I do wonder what I’ll do starting tomorrow. When I realize I might not be able to talk with her at school like that anymore, I guess it does make me a little sad.”
“Oh, so you like your pretty friend, do you?”
Librarian-chan then laughed a little.
She seemed to have remembered her comment about being glad he was not robotic.

“But in that case, don’t you want to save her? I mean, my sister takes top priority, but, um, I could still help with that.”
“…”
Kyousuke narrowed his eyes a little.
“No, I can’t do that.”
“Why not?”
“I still haven’t saved you after you asked me to. Sorry, but I can’t make a promise that amounts to abandoning someone.”
As he spoke, Kyousuke looked Librarian-chan right in the eye.
“I-I see.”
When the girl blushed and averted her gaze a bit, Kyousuke *interpreted it incorrectly.*
“Did that make you think I’m robotic?”
“Eh? No, it wasn’t that… But it’s hard to explain…”
“Don’t worry. As I said before, the uniqueness of the summoning ceremony is dependent on the summoner. Save for exceptional cases like Lu-san, you just have to cancel your contract with me once the job is complete. Then people will stop forgetting you and you won’t be susceptible to possession by vengeful and evil spirits. So you can just think of this like an overseas trip.”
She could return to normal.
Her expression briefly lit up at that, but then she realized something.
“Hey, in that case…what will you do?”
He shrugged.
“I’m still trying to figure that out.”

Part 9

“Onii-chan. How many times do I have to tell you this is a shut-in girl’s final stronghold?”
“And?”
“Why and for what possible reason are you thoughtlessly bringing yet another girl here!? It doesn’t make any sense!!”
It was just before ten at night.
They had run across that summoner assassin at around 7:30. After the ten minute battle, they had spent about an hour at the laundromat and then come here, so that meant they had taken a very careful and roundabout route.
That showed just how cautious Kyousuke was about their enemies.

Librarian-chan's clothing had made a full recovery in the washer and dryer and Kyousuke had his hoodie back, so he was back to normal aside from the faint scent of soap on his hoodie.
"Oh, this is the new Korokke-chan they were selling at the convenience store. It's a special for the Rainy Screen campaign and it has Western wasabi powder on it."
"Hm. That I'll take. I still refuse to accept my Onii-chan's thoughtless behavior, though!!"
As she complained, Aika opened up the paper bag used to shake up the wasabi powder-covered fried food.
"Um, Kyousuke-chan," cut in Lu Niang Lan. "Something greasy probably isn't best, so did you buy a normal meal too?"
"We bought and ate sautéed pork and grilled vegetable sandwiches on the way. More importantly, I have something to ask you, Lu-san."
"Before that."
"?"
"How about you look after that girl? She looks really jumpy and isn't showing any sign of joining in the conversation."
When the Modified China Dress Beauty pointed that out, Kyousuke looked behind him.
The always cheerful Librarian-chan had become incredibly quiet ever since entering the large living room. She was wearing her idea of adult-looking clothes after drying them at the laundromat. She uncomfortably fidgeted with her braided hair, but it was not that she was feeling shy around the strange people here.
The real reason was obvious.
It had to be the "sofa" that Swimsuit Girl Aika was leaning against.
Anyone would grow nervous when faced with five meter beast.
"U-um, Shiroyama-kun? That's a pet, isn't it? It isn't going to get up and roar, is it?"
"Don't ask me. But knowing Aika, I doubt it's been trained properly. And I'm not too confident a white liger can even be tamed in the first place."
"Then why are you all so calm!?"
"Shh! Shouting or turning your back on it is dangerous!"
Meanwhile, Aika, its owner, was leaning up against the beast in a completely defenseless outfit while chowing down on junk food that had to be stimulating the animal's stomach with its smell. It was unclear what was safe and what was dangerous.
"And if you feel unsafe, you can always hide behind Lu-san. If the beast goes on a rampage, she can deal with it barehanded."
"Umm, that's scary enough on its own. Is she a hermit who lives deep in the mountains or something?"
Librarian-chan's voice was shaking.

But since that young woman had the skill to take out any summoner with nothing but her bare hands and hidden weapons, it may have been right to worry about her more than the white liger.
“So Kyousuke-chan, what did you want to ask me?”
“It’s about the Illegal assassin that showed up at the end of everything at the airport before,” said Kyousuke. “He attacked us earlier, so do you know anything about him?”
“Oh, him.” Lu Niang Lan seemed hesitant. “I decided to look into him since he pissed me off…but I couldn’t find any Illegal records on him.”
“What does that mean?”
“Since he showed up there, his actions had to have been a plus for Illegal, but he may have been a summoner with no connection to us, a Freedom summoner that Illegal hired through an intermediary, or…”
“A secret weapon who Illegal keeps hidden?”
The information had dried up right off the bat.
That was fine if they never saw him again after that one battle, but the odds of that were low. So it was best if they could gather some information on his habits, special traits, and weaknesses, but…
“By the way, Kyousuke-chan, how skilled was this unknown?”
“He was more of a pain than he was powerful. We used the full ten minutes, but we never even made it out of the Regulation-class and to the Divine-class.”
“An interference type, huh? That does sound like a pain.” Lu Niang Lan smiled and waved a hand dismissively. “Then, Kyousuke-chan, besides his technique as a summoner, did you sense anything about his principles…or rather, did he seem to follow any inviolable rules?”
“Hm?”
Librarian-chan looked confused, so the Modified China Dress Beauty raised her index finger and explained.
“In Illegal, we don’t bother obeying the existing laws and treaties. We don’t gain anything by obeying them since we specifically exist as an organization not protected by the government. In that case, what do we obey? That would be the inviolable rules of our team or the bonds of blood of our family.”
“Stop trying to make yourself sound good when you’re just a group of perverted criminals who kidnap, confine, and assassinate people.”
“From your perspective in Government, maybe. But in Illegal, it’s all based on our own rules which are meant to maintain order. In other words, it’s the same as what you call an investigation, an arrest, an arraignment, a trial, and a punishment. And it’s obvious what wins out when the existing laws clash with our inviolable rules.”
That was why Government and Illegal simply could not get along.
The people of the heavens above controlled the international laws while looking down on everyone. The people of the earth below corrupted the masses from within to expand their own share.

Freedom joined neither side but helped both, so they basically had extraterritoriality like Nagasaki's Dejima. Of course, they did not just obey them. If either one went too far, they were prepared to retaliate with an intense war. In a way, they were the individual summoners who fought alone against an international coalition force or an international mafia. That was (the original meaning of) Freedom.
"Those inviolable rules and bonds of blood aren't unified within Illegal. If the summoner who attacked you really was from Illegal, knowing his principles could help narrow it down to the specific team or family."
Kyousuke shrugged at Lu Niang Lan's suggestion.
"Unfortunately, I don't know that much. All I know is he has pride in his work as an assassin, he'll speak with his target but not empathize with them, he's willing to use tricks or deceit to take out his target, and he's fixated on the Rainy Girl."
Librarian-chan hesitantly cut in there.
"I asked this before, but how is that assassin connected with us? The Rainy Girl is just a rumor to most people, right? And from what you've said, ghosts aren't very significant to summoners."
"Lu-san."
"Didn't I already tell you that unknown wasn't in any of Illegal's records? Don't ask me for help here."
"Oh, right. It might be a fake name, but what about someone named Benikomichi Fuuki? She's our student council president but also the vessel for that assassin…Hayato I think she called him."
"Benikomichi, hm? Give me a second. I'll shoot some Illegal people an email and ask them to gather some information."
Lu Niang Lan operated her smartphone with her index finger as she spoke. She seemed entirely carefree.
Aika must have thought the half-eaten korokke tasted too bland because she put it back in the paper bag and shook it around.
"To be blunt, maybe that assassin is the one behind the murder the ghost is based on. Maybe he's afraid of you approaching the truth as you pursue the ghost."
"I…doubt that."
Librarian-chan immediately rejected the idea.
She had a simple reason.
"The murderer was caught almost immediately. He was a crazy man. My parents told me not to watch the news, but I still remember it. Was it called genetic tuning? He was apparently like a mass of muscles that completely ignored the usual skeletal structure. That boy was only about twelve, so I doubt he was behind some murder in the past."
Kyousuke agreed with that assessment.
"I disagree with the idea that a small child can't kill, but, well, I agree he wasn't behind the murder."
"Why?"

“We aren’t quite sure who he is and he might not even be with Illegal, but I’m pretty sure he’s still an assassin. He wasn’t the type to kill for his own sake. And based on what I’ve heard of your family, Librarian-chan, I doubt it would have been worth hiring a professional assassin to attack a child. Of course, that would change if your parents were politicians or executives of an international corporation.”
“But then this makes no sense, does it?” said Lu Niang Lan. “We know this unknown is standing in your way. And we know he is skilled enough to instantly resolve that airport occupation by stably and reliably summoning a Divine-class without relying on beginner’s luck. I wonder why he’s challenging you to a fight.”
“Maybe he was lying at some point or we made a mistake at some point,” said Kyousuke. “The Rainy Girl, a murder from the past, an Illegal summoner, and a professional assassin… One of our premises is off and that’s why the gears don’t seem to fit together. But they must fit together. We’re holding something worth sending in that assassin. So what exactly is it we’re not seeing here?”
Aika and Lu Niang Lan exchanged a glance.
As outsiders, they readily gave objective opinions.
“Is it possible the Rainy Girl doesn’t actually have anything to do with that past murder?”
“That was definitely my sister.”
“Could the unknown be an amateur assassin who’s only claiming to be a professional?”
“With that skill and pride? I doubt it.”
Their suggestions were not serious. They were simply cutting away the blatantly needless fat.
And finally, just the core remained.
“Maybe the crux of the issue isn’t the Rainy Girl,” muttered Kyousuke.
Librarian-chan frowned.
“Wait a minute. What do you mean? All of this weird stuff started when I started seeing that ghost.”
“But that premise might be wrong.” Kyousuke chose his words carefully. “I’m not suggesting the Rainy Girl isn’t real. I saw her with you, after all. … But is she really a *naturally appearing ghost*? Ghosts can be explained with the rules of the summoning ceremony. And if they can be explained with them, they can also be reproduced with them. Which means…”
“Oh, I get it,” said Lu Niang Lan as she placed a hand on her forehead.
Librarian-chan still didn’t seem to understand, so Kyousuke stated his conclusion.
“In other words, there might be a completely different plan at work here. *And as a side effect, it just so happened to cause the Rainy Girl to appear.* That would mean the ghost isn’t at the center of all this. It’s just that we might discover the truth behind it and whatever it’s connected to.”

And if they pursued the cause of the Rainy Girl, they would run into the assassins' plan. Afraid they would discover what was going on, the assassins had acted first.
Since they had already been monitoring Librarian-chan's home or the surrounding cellphone towers, the assassins had to be aware that the Rainy Girl was their Achilles' heel.
They had not annihilated her with an Incense Grenade, so they may have had a reason to keep her around or her appearances were too random to reliably run across her.
"But…" Librarian-chan started to reject the idea on reflex, but then she had second thoughts. "The rumors of the Rainy Girl only started spreading over the internet after I entered high school. At the very least, my sister's ghost wasn't seen when I was in elementary and middle school."
"If she started appearing recently, it might be best to assume something happened recently to cause it."
"Hmm…" muttered Aika while licking off her greasy fingers.
She then grabbed the notebook-sized tablet from the glass table. The entire ceiling functioned as a giant projection screen.
It showed a simple map of Toy Dream 35.
Red, yellow, green, and blue colored bars appeared on the edge of the map. It looked a lot like the rain map shown on the weather forecast.
"What is this, Aika?"
"Packet Atmosphere. It's a type of information system built by Government. Simply put, it visualizes the distribution of rumors."
"Can you make that more detailed but simpler?"
"Don't underestimate the expressiveness of a shut-in. With the cooperation of a major mobile SNS, we can run automatic searches of when and where different keywords were typed in and then it can be displayed on the map according to time. Surely you can understand that."
For example, research had shown that areas with an explosive increase in searches for "the flu" really did have an outbreak of the flu. Necessity was the mother of invention and people wanted to search when they had the search box right in front of their eyes.
What Aika was using had narrowed that down to more of a pinpoint. When she entered a search term, the devices that had made corresponding blog entries or SNS posts would be listed up and the device locations would be displayed on the map.
For example…
"Let's try searching for 'house fire'. And look."
Colors were added to the map of Toy Dream 35. Blue and green dots were scattered around, but the dots were noticeably clustered around a few spots. And they had warning colors of red and yellow.
"Most likely, there are actual houses on fire in those areas."

“This system throws the concepts of personal information and privacy out the window,” commented Lu Niang Lan. “But what else would you expect from the governments and corporations of Government?”
“SNSs are used by people who want to show off. Plus, this just *scrapes* all that text with a program, so we’re not actually reading what their blogs say.”
“Wait, Aika. I’m pretty sure you’ve crossed a line when you start displaying their location without permission.”
“Onii-chan, are you the kind of Onii-chan that uses logic to trample on the cooperation of a benevolent soul? Anyway, we can use this to find exactly how far the rumors of the Rainy Girl have spread.”
After Aika narrowed the results down to Toy Dream 35 and entered the search term they actually cared about, the results appeared almost instantly.
Just like on a weather forecast, they could fast-forward through time to see the clusters of red, yellow, green, and blue dots crawling along like living creatures.
The SNS’s first hit for the Rainy Girl was about a month before. As Librarian-chan had suggested it was at the start of April when the school year had begun.
Dots sporadically appeared and disappeared from there, but there were places where they occasionally grew like crazy as if people had suddenly remembered it.
“R Block, April 15, 10 PM. S Block, April 17, 2 AM. D Block, April 23, 1:30 PM…”
“Are these red places where my sister’s ghost was seen?”
“That’s just when the witnesses posted about it on the SNS, so she might have also appeared where no one saw it.”
“Come to think of it, these aren’t where I saw her…”
Librarian-chan looked up at the map on the ceiling with a troubled look on her face.
Kyousuke spoke to Aika.
“Do you know what happened at these times? Did a ghost story TV drama air, was a sound truck with a message about demons driving around, or was a costume parade underway? It could be anything. I just want something that matches all of these appearance times.”
“Government’s got you covered.”
Aika minimized the Packet Atmosphere window and opened a different application. A bunch of text scrolled quickly by and finally some human-readable text started appearing.
“I’ve detected a few patterns that match the noise problem.”
“Like what? It could be a lot of things: people, vehicles, buildings, etc.”
“It seems to be a building… Look.”
Aika gave the answer.

“Here it is. It fits the operation records for the Toshima Industries 3rd Toy Factory on the outskirts of Toy Dream 35.”
“Isn’t that the factory that makes the character goods that Toy Dream 35 sells?” asked a skeptical Librarian-chan.
The Toy Dream Company’s international revived city project bought up rural cities that had fallen into bankruptcy and remade them into giant amusement parks, but that of course did not entirely eliminate the unease and backlash from the local residents. To erase that sort of impression, the amusement park city contained almost no manufacturing facilities. From food to industrial products, it was almost entirely reliant on the nearby cities. That way they shared the wealth with the local residents instead of monopolizing it.
“The Rainy Girl rumors perfectly match the time they spent testing a new production line. Most likely, that’s had some kind of effect.”
“A factory testing a new line on rainy nights…” muttered Kyousuke, but that was not enough to reach an answer.
“But they aren’t going to all this effort just to summon my sister to scare me…right? And if they were trying to get the ghost to kill me, a simple knife seems like a better method.”
“We’ll just have to look into this and figure out whether she’s their objective or just a side effect.”
Of course, things were likely to change if they actually snuck into the toy factory on the outskirts of the city.
It had likely been turned into Hayato and Benikomichi Fuuki’s hideout.
“Librarian-chan.”
“My name, my name. …And what is it?”
“You asked me to protect you from the Rainy Girl. If that’s all you want, we might not need to investigate this factory. It might be enough to just wait for the Rainy Girl to appear and annihilate her.”
“But…we’re up against assassins, right? And they came to kill us because we were becoming a problem. Can we really step down from the stage now?”
“Based on the situation surrounding the attack, they were monitoring your home or the surrounding area. Since they hadn’t done anything before, it might mean they won’t actually kill you. If you weren’t going to approach the truth, they were going to leave you alone.”
“…”
“So with that in mind, let me ask again: what do you want to do? I don’t mind if you make that decision.”
“Is that even a question?”
Librarian-chan did not hesitate to answer.
Even though she had likely reached an instinctual understanding of their opponent’s skill.
“I’m still scared of my sister. I really think she’s trying to kill me. But this isn’t right. That factory might be summoning her, right? Even if we defeat

her, she might appear again as long as that factory's still running. I can't allow that kind of pain. What do they think a human being is? Even if she's dead, she's still a human being. Do they really need someone to explain to them that the dead have rights too!?"
"What do you want to do?"
"I want to destroy that factory. But I need power to do that. Shiroyama-kun, lend me a hand. I'm sure that will solve all of this."
Unlike before, she did not just ask for "help".
Instead of hoping someone else would do something, she wanted a helping hand to do something herself.
Kyousuke smiled a little.
And he answered.
"Then let's go with that."
He spoke clearly as if to motivate himself.
"I don't know who we're up against, but this means war."

Investigation Records of a Certain Pair of Twins 02

When people fall asleep on the last train or on a train that begins deadheading, they go missing and never return. But for some reason, the fact that people are vanishing never ends up in the news.
The rumor had branched off into a number of forms, so some had a less frightening conclusion: a reunion with a forgotten first love, the return of a runaway pet, or the discovery of a lost treasure. But those derivations had spread outside Japan to places like Guam, so they had even less credibility.
It was already almost midnight.
Even so, Meinokawa Renge could not find her "sister" Higan.
"…"
Her confused mind went back over everything that had happened.
The monorail had come to a stop at one of Toy Dream 35's switchyards. She had checked through every nook and cranny of every car and managed to pry open the doors even though the power was off, but she had not found her "sister" anywhere in the darkness.
The switchyard was large, but it was all indoors. There were no windows, so she had no idea if it was underground or a giant box dangling in midair.
A few possibilities had come to mind.
It was possible Higan had gotten off at another station while Renge slept.
It was possible Higan had woken up first at the switchyard and gone on alone.

It was possible it was Renge who had disappeared and not Higan.
“My phone…isn’t any help.”
She checked the cheap cellphone’s screen, but it had no bars for some reason. Her notebook-sized tablet also had no signal.
As she checked around the switchyard, she found wet footprints on the concrete ground. They looked like the footprints from the geta she wore, but she did not think she had run across her own footprints after wandering around too much. These footprints continuing further on were likely Higan’s.
(Although I don’t know if this was Higan herself or someone who stole her shoes.)
Even if it was a trap, it was definitely information leading to the next hint.
Renge gulped and slowly followed the wet footprints.
As she did, she noticed something odd about the scenery.
This was definitely a switchyard, but there was no sign of the maintenance equipment moving. There was not even a scent of machine oil and everything was covered in clear plastic as if being preserved as a crime scene.
Confused, she continued on, but then the hint came to an end.
The footprints led outside. And beyond the stainless steel door was the rain that seemed to be oozing from the night sky. The wet footprints vanished once they reached the wet roadway.
“Dammit!!”
Renge violently cursed and ran outside despite the rain. She searched around the door for some other hint, but she could not find any clue to her “sister’s” location. Panic grew inside her, but she did find something strange.
The city was entirely silent.
When she had visited before, the place had been filled with decorative lights twenty four hours a day, but not a single light bulb was on now. She also heard no passing cars and no talking people. There was no trash on the road and the entire place seemed entirely unlived in.
(Wh-what? What is going on here?)
To be blunt, this phenomenon was stranger than a national TV station’s power going out. This was a city of sightseeing, so the economy had a 100% chance of collapsing if they could not maintain a certain number of tourists.
Renge looked around in shock and found something else.
The billboard on a building wall was covered in a clear plastic sheet and duct tape just like the switchyard maintenance equipment. She looked to the text on the billboard through the raindrops on the plastic.
“Let’s give Toy Dream 35 a lovely name! In this new campaign, it’s your ideas that will name the city!!”
“What…is this?” muttered Renge.
Toy Dream 35 was Toy Dream 35. She had never heard of it having another name.

Some clearly odd things were mixed into the familiar city.
While unrealistically thinking it looked like a half-made city, she looked up and found something else that was odd.
A large retro flip clock was attached to a building wall. But the arrangement of numbers on the glow-in-the-dark display was clearly wrong. The date it showed was a few decades into the future.
The amount of deterioration and filth on a single building completely changed from floor to floor.
Each of the roadside trees had grown drastically different amounts.
The scenery was a complete mess, as if someone had torn up several different photos and cobbled them together.
Renge thought for a bit and then looked down at the notebook-sized tablet that was acting as a light source. She looked for any rumors that sounded related to this.
She used her fingertip to slide from one article to another.
Then she found a rumor that fit the current situation.
A writer for a town information magazine had gathered several ghost stories he had heard about in Toy Dream 35.
“I started to drift off on the train and suddenly woke up to find I was the only one onboard. I was too scared to see if anyone was in the driver’s compartment up front. As I trembled in fear, I blinked and suddenly found myself back on the train full of other passengers. I thought I had just woken up from a dream, but what if I have been wandering through a dream ever since? Or…?”
Another was an excerpt from “Strange Reports from the Official Records”, a popular collection of tidbits that ran in a weekly magazine.
“As the planner viewed the scene, he complained into his cellphone: ‘Your huge-ass sign is in the way, so no one can see our advertisement from the station.’ When the construction workers checked the plans back in their office, they all tilted their heads. There shouldn’t have been a giant sign there, so what was this guy seeing?”
Where had Meinokawa Higan gone?
No.
That was not the appropriate question.
“Where am I right now?”
This was an empty city.
All the lights were out in a place where the lights should never have gone out.
Strange things which should not have been found in the real Toy Dream 35 were mixed into the scenery.
What proof did she have that she was really in Toy Dream 35?

Facts

- Student Council President Benikomichi Fuuki was the enemy vessel. She repeatedly canceled and rebound her contract at intervals as short as five minutes to blend into normal human society. However, the risk of side effects is high.
- The Artificial Sacred Ground is set up relative to the surface the Incense Grenade detonates on. This can be the floor, the ground, a wall, the ceiling, or a vehicle. In that case, artificial gravity is created to allow the summoners and vessels to stand on the wall or ceiling.
- If the Artificial Sacred Ground's reference surface is destroyed, the next surface stepped on by the summoner who instigated the battle will become the new reference surface. Unlike when the Incense Grenade detonates, the enemy summoner and vessel will also obey the new artificial gravity. New Spots will be set, but the Petals be forcibly slid from the old Artificial Sacred Ground to the new one.
- A Petal that falls into a Spot without touching anyone's White Thorn will vanish without counting.
- Summoner Hayato and Vessel Benikomichi Fuuki's affiliation is unknown. At the very least, they were not registered in the Illegal lists that Lu Niang Lan could check. Also, Hayato refers to Benikomichi Fuuki as "mistress".
- The times a toy factory on the outskirts of Toy Dream 35 tests a new line match the times the Rainy Girl appears. Rainy nights and the factory's activity likely have some kind of influence on the Rainy Girl.

Stage 03: A World Void of Death, but Not a World of Happiness

「始めよう」

「始めるって……ここから!?」

(Stage 03 Open 05/01 00:10)

ステージ03

死臭なき世界、だが幸福は訪れず

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Let’s get started.”
“Get started? …From here!?”
(Stage 03 Open 05/01 00:10)
A World Void of Death, but Not a World of Happiness

Part ?

An archived file stored on analog microfilm for fear of a cyberattack.
From a Government report on enemy forces.
There is an organization known as Killer Intent Antenna.
It is rumored to have between one and two hundred members, but the details are unknown.
They are all specialists taken from the front lines: former police officers, former soldiers, former white hat hackers, former doctors, former firefighters, former reporters, former politicians, former scientists, former pilots, former bankers, former spies, etc. By sharing and teaching their skills within the organization, they thoroughly analyze the actions of those who protect the public order. They are also said to use that to freely slip through the holes of the net, but it is unknown whether that is true or a legend.
Their objective is extremely simple: to search out and eliminate people who deserve to die.
In other words, they are an elite organization of intelligence agents who gather information and assassins who slaughter the people they identify.
Their basis for who “deserves to die” surpasses the interests of a specific religion, nation, corporation, or other such framework and it cannot be changed by external pressure. It may be similar to the concept of “changing history” seen in discussions of time travel. It is entirely unknown what sort of “ideal world” they are attempting to create by killing the people on their list. The construction and maintenance of the organization must require vast amounts of money, so it can at least be assumed they have a reason warranting that sort of investment.
So on the surface they are less of a criminal organization seeking dirty money and more of an ideological group whose actions are based on twisted dogma.
The reason they have not been eliminated – no, have been impossible to eliminate – is simple. They just have that much “power”.
A certain man stood at the top.
The founder’s name was Yasuzumi Reiji.

He was also a skilled summoner known as Illegal Award 910, Telomere's End, but his life met an unexpectedly simple end.
He committed suicide.
He left an extremely short suicide note, but its authenticity is unknown. There are even many doubts as to whether or not his death was really a suicide.
Regardless, his two-sentence suicide note said the following:
I failed to kill someone who deserved to die. The least I can do is pay for that crime with my life.

Part 2

The sort of van used by foreign delivery companies had the back windows covered with plates. Its mustard yellow coloring stood out like a sore thumb and it was currently stopped in an industrial district on the outskirts of Toy Dream 35 late at night.
All of the seats had been removed from the back and replaced by a stretcher and fluorescent lights.
It resembled an ambulance, but it was not one.
Student Council President Benikomichi Fuuki lay face-down on the stretcher. She only wore the paper underwear used at beauty salons, her long black hair was tied up, and her white back was fully exposed in the light.
Someone whistled lightly.
It was the young male technician who had been grinning inside the van even as she "changed clothes".
"Now that's impressive. Not the design I'd expect from a student council president."
"I would like some maintenance done on it. Just fill in the pattern's faded colors like this is a coloring book. You can easily make a bit of money that way, right?"
"Well, the age of doing *tattoos* by hand is over. The machine does all the work, so it'll be over in no time. But the quicker you want it done, the more it'll hurt."
The young male technician readily answered her while moving a hydraulic metal arm and pressing what looked like a sewing machine to the girl's back.
Yes, this was a mobile tattoo shop.

When Toy Dream's international revived cities arrived, the local country's culture and ethics were overwritten by the Western norms. Japanese-style tattoos were still strongly associated with organized crime, but Western tribal tattoos were a common sight.
Benikomichi Fuuki had an angular tribal pattern carved across her back, covering both shoulder blades. Overall, it looked something like drawing out wings with the printed circuits of an electronic circuit board.
However, this was not for fashion.
Just like a collar or handcuffs, it was her symbol of bondage as a vessel.
"Should I use anesthetic?"
"It would be meaningless if you did."
"Wow, you're hardcore."
With the sounds of motors, gears, cranks, and other mechanical parts coming from the box, a burning rather than stabbing pain covered Benikomichi Fuuki's back.
Even that expert vessel could not deny the pain itself.
But she clenched her teeth. She delighted in finding meaning in this.
"Kids these days (ha ha) always ask me to make it as painless as possible, like this is the dentist or something. I wouldn't have thought a school's star pupil would have a personal opinion on how to do tattoos."
"It's because I'm a star pupil and from a well-known family that this functions so well as a symbol of bondage."
"Bondage?"
Yes. Tattoos themselves were not uncommon, but there was a time and a place for them.
This girl was from a well-known family, she was the student council president, and she was close to receiving an important position at the global Toy Dream Company. Her position in society suggested she lived and breathed tea, cakes, pianos, violins, horseback riding, tea ceremonies, and flower arrangements, so this tribal tattoo on her back was truly disastrous.
It was a secret utterly at odds with the impression she gave people.
She could never let anyone see her skin.
That feeling of rejection worked perfectly as a symbol of bondage.
"When your symbol of bondage is reliant on an object, there is a risk of having it stolen or destroyed. So carve it into your body. It can even be a small scar or burn."
A summoner man had told her of this method long ago. That man was no longer with her, but she smiled at the fact that she continued to follow that rule so faithfully even now.
Summoners were those who accepted their own weakness and then reached for greater heights.
Vessels were those who entrusted their independence to another and then reached for honor.
At least, that was the way she saw it.

That was why she could not escape her dependence on that summoner who was now gone.
The cellphone sitting next to her vibrated.
Even with lasers and ultrasonic waves constantly scanning her skin, she could not move her arms while the work was being done to her back. Doing so would move her shoulder blades. She ignored the phone and it vibrated a second and third time after short breaks of silence.
It was most likely from Hayato. He was clearly waiting for further instructions. He was like a puppy who, after being brought to an unfamiliar land on a trip, looked fearfully over to his family while hiding his usual mischievous personality.
Benikomichi Fuuki gently narrowed her eyes as she looked to the cellphone.
“Your boyfriend?” asked the young technician.
“No. But he is my support.”
She had taken everything of that dead summoner and shoved it onto Hayato, her current partner.
Reaching this point had not been easy. When a vessel’s contract with their summoner was broken, they returned to being a normal person. They forgot everything about the world of the summoning ceremony. That was true even if the summoner died, so if she had not been coincidentally picked up by another summoner, she would never have remembered.
She had deceived that summoner and pretended to obey to keep those memories.
And then she had found the greatest potential.
After achieving some success in educating him for his talent, she had gotten rid of her “temporary home” and made a new contract with that “greatest potential”.
And so this student council president drifted within the warmth of a man who was already dead.
It did not matter if that warmth was artificially created.
It was like transferring over the original flame.
It did not matter if she had to manipulate everything around her.
“But, young lady, are you sure you should be doing this?”
“Doing what?”
“Letting some random guy on the street see this shocking secret of yours.”
“You have a mobile shop so you don’t end up with ‘regulars’, right?”
“Ha ha. But a beauty like you will stick in my memory whether I like it or not! How do you know I’m not a bad guy who will order you do to all sorts of nasty things?”
“Oh, there’s no chance of that.”
“Oh, dear. Do I look that harmless?”
“No. Whatever kind of person you are, *you’ll forget all about me soon enough.*”
“?”

Part 3

After waiting for midnight, Kyousuke and Librarian-chan made their way to the factory district on the outskirts of Toy Dream 35.
This was obviously to arrive while Toshima Industries 3rd Toy Factory was testing its new production line. If something was happening, they could likely get the most information if they aimed for the time when it was happening. Of course, that also meant arriving when the factory would be most cautious.
They took the monorail outside of Toy Dream 35.
The rain continually switched between pouring and letting up outside the window and they happened to catch one of the rainless periods.
“Since the factory is running, is my sister wandering around somewhere today too?”
Librarian-chan gloomily asked her question while staring out the window.
The light quickly vanished once they left Toy Dream 35. They found pure darkness. While the amusement park city was filled with decorative lights 24/7, there were only occasional fluorescent lights here. They were enough to break through the night’s darkness, but the color black stickily clung to everything.
When they stepped out onto the platform, the temperature seemed to have dropped by a degree or two.
Even without a map, Toy Dream 35’s location could not have been more obvious. A vague region of light was visible despite the darkness.
They were on the outskirts.
To coexist with Toy Dream 35, countless factories were scattered around, sometimes even affecting the livability of the area.
The mascot characters on the sides of the trucks parked alongside the road were enough to see the level of economic dependence.
“It feels weird to see an actual dirt ground,” said Librarian-chan as she looked to the puddle at her feet. “No, I guess it’s us that’s weird. People are so good at adapting to their situation.”
The area around the monorail station had nothing more than dark soil and some woods. It only had an asphalt road and streetlights, so it was almost entirely undeveloped. When they looked down a gentle five hundred meter hill, they saw a fence that seemed to stretch on forever.
That was Toshima Industries 3rd Toy Factory.
The term factory could refer to a number of things, but the one beyond the three meter tall fence was a lot like an automobile factory. It looked like a square box with each side over a kilometer long. The square factory was

over five stories tall and the only distortions to its shape were the smokestacks sticking up from its flat roof at even intervals.
Kyousuke held a small pair of binoculars in one hand to observe different parts of the factory grounds.
It took him less than a minute to finish.
Librarian-chan was shocked when he handed them to her.
“Eh? Ah? You’re done already?”
“Yes. Why wouldn’t I be?”
“Because that’s a huge fortress of a factory. There have to be a ton of guards even at night… See, I barely had to look and I’ve already found a bunch! It looks like there are security cameras all over, so sneaking in won’t be easy…”
“That’s where you’re wrong.”
Kyousuke reached over to the binoculars Librarian-chan was looking through.
But not to take them from her.
He pushed them from the side to guide her gaze.
“The first thing we need to think about is where to get in from. The factory has no windows to speak of. The entrances and exits are all locked and they’re either thick steel shutters for vehicles or reinforced stainless steel doors for people. There are panels near the doors, so you probably need a card key.”
“That means we’re already out of luck…”
“We just have to change our viewpoint. Look over there.”
Kyousuke moved the binoculars to the next point.
It was a point on the ground inside the fence but a short distance from the boxy factory. A few metal tanks that resembled truck-sized cans were lying on their side in a row. The pipes connected to them ran underground.
A few large containers were lined up next to those.
Confused, Librarian-chan read the writing on the side of the tanks.
“Caution: Flammable?”
“Based on the shape of the tanks, they’re filled with LNG for gas turbines. It isn’t much for a factory this big, so my guess is it’s fuel for emergency power.”
“What good is that? If we set it on fire, it will cause a huge commotion and we won’t be able to sneak in. And it’s too far away from the factory to blow a hole in the wall if it explodes.”
“We don’t need to go that far.”
Kyousuke gently took the binoculars from Librarian-chan.
He pointed at something nearby and continued his explanation.
“This is a gentle downwards slope.”
“And?”
“There are a ton of large trucks with mascots painted on them.”
After he pointed here and there, he moved his finger from one truck, down the slope, and to the factory.

“Opening a door that’s locked from the inside is easy. …You just have to get the people inside to open it.”

Part 4

After growing accustomed to military uniforms, the unnecessarily starchy guard uniforms felt too stiff. To make matters worse, they had to wear raincoats over them due to all the rain. The guns they carried felt unreliable. They understood it had to be small enough to hide in their pockets, but with a submachine gun with a barrel less than 20 cm long and only three magazines, they could only buy time rather than kill. That role of theirs was especially obvious from the fact that their military flashlights were their most expensive piece of equipment.
Their inviolable rule was the following:
Justice is power. Thus, the weak must support the strong. Even if it meant a tactical failure, they had to pave the way toward strategic victory.
Simply put, if a bomb was thrown at the summoner’s feet, they were to jump on top of the dangerous object to suppress the blast.
And if they did not want to die in vain, they had to increase their own power.
Anyone could be the most powerful. But that person had to be aware of the many comrades whose blood had paved their way and thus use that power to help the weak.
“…”
What they feared most here was the arrival of a summoner.
If that happened, they had to hold the intruder in place while their summoner could prepare for battle. That was their role. They were the bright light that blinded the enemy while also pointing out the target’s location in the night.
So the soldiers patrolling around the factory had not expected this sort of trouble.
“…Hey?”
Someone gave a confused comment.
A large truck was slowly rolling down the gentle slope. Its headlights were off and its movements showed no sign of a driver. It did not look like anyone was stepping on the gas. It looked more like the handbrake had failed to work.
But even if it was only moving at five or ten kph, it was still a mass of metal weighing over twenty tons.

Submachine guns that fired handgun rounds would be useless. And with no driver, warning shots would be meaningless.
The truck veered off the road and broke through some of the trees in the woods before finally smashing through the chain link fence and onto the factory grounds.
The soldiers watched the truck in a daze, but then they noticed where the mass of metal was headed: the emergency power fuel tank stored a short distance from the factory's outer wall.
"Oh, no!!"
Someone shouted, but it was no use.
As soon as the giant metal tank was broken like an empty can bitten by a fierce dog, a dazzling explosion tore apart the dark night.

Part 5

Kyousuke had walked alongside the large truck that had been moving even slower than a bicycle and now he glanced over at the broken fence inside the woods next to the road.
"Let's get started," he whispered to Librarian-chan.
"Get started? …From here!? But that explosion was like poking at a hornet's nest!!"
"But it will have torn down their highly organized guard shifts. Their focus is no longer evenly distributed, so we can walk around safely by slipping through the gaps."
"Are you…really my classmate Shiroyama-kun?"
For some reason, Librarian-chan felt the need to ask that.
There were two general ways to get into a strictly guarded facility: sneak in the back way or boldly walk in through the front.
They could not directly walk in through the broken fence as there were too many eyes focused on it. But instead, the factory's main gate (which was protected by a bar like at a train crossing and retractable spikes on the ground) was wide open. There was no one inside the "large phone booth" that normally held a guard.
Librarian-chan asked a question while crouching down as she walking nervously through.
"Did the person here go to the fire too? I'm glad since it makes this easier, but why?"

She looked toward the fire where black smoke completely covered the area where the truck had ended up. The fire was only growing more intense, but the number of people there was also growing.
All those solid metal doors were opening from the inside.
“Whether it’s an armory for anti-government guerrillas or a storehouse for drug dealers, any group stockpiling things they can’t have found will always have their own firefighting group. If they called a normal firetruck, the firefighters would discover their secret.”
Kyousuke leaned into the guard station and messed with something as he answered.
“And emergency fuel will be stored someplace that won’t blow up the factory itself if it explodes. That’s why they’ll use that same spot for other things that would cause a problem if they exploded. …Those metal containers next to the tanks are probably their armory. They would be in trouble in a number of ways if the fire spreads to them, so this is more than ‘just a fire’ to them and it gathers a lot of attention.”
“I see. So that’s why they…”
Librarian-chan trailed off as she remembered something.
The guards’ eyes were all gathered on one spot and the locked doors had been opened from within.
However, those were not the only problems.
“But what about all the security cameras? I’m sure they can monitor all of the passageways inside the factory, so how are we supposed to walk around without getting caught?”
“That’s why I cut the security line.”
“…”
Dumbfounded, Librarian-chan saw Kyousuke wave around a few torn cables.
“After what happened, they’ll assume the explosion and the heat of the fire knocked out the buried cables. So let’s get inside the factory already.”
Kyousuke stepped inside the factory grounds using the black smokescreen to hide. Librarian-chan followed after him.
They could hear a storm of yelling voices and footsteps running all over the place. Librarian-chan’s shoulders jumped each time, but Kyousuke did not react.
“Based on the size of the factory and grounds, they would need between fifty and a hundred people. To put out the fire, they’re ignoring their usual section assignments and gathering here, so no one will question it if someone is walking around where they wouldn’t normally be.”
Kyousuke then added something else under his breath.
“Government would have military-level Repliglass posted around and Freedom would have a bunch of individual summoners. …Despite what Lu-san said, this reeks of Illegal.”
“But we aren’t dressed anything like them. We’ll stand out if they see us here.”

“We just have to make sure they don’t see us. It’s night and there’s smoke everywhere. In the world of the summoning ceremony, even a paper-thin barrier is enough to keep you safe as long as your opponent can’t see you with the naked eye. If they just hear footsteps or see a silhouette, they’ll assume it’s one of their own.”
Kyousuke used his smartphone to gather the electromagnetic signals in the area and to convert them to audio.
Simply put, he was intercepting the soldiers’ voices.
Someone inside the factory seemed to be speaking with the fire station.
“Yes, yes. So it isn’t a problem. As I’m sure you can see if you check our records, our factory is breaking in a new production line at night. That was probably what people mistook for an explosion.”
“But we received reports of an explosion from the nearby residents…”
“Not to worry. There was some protective coating caked onto the inside of the smokestacks. To get it all off, we intentionally upped the power. Think of it as something like an extreme version of the after-fire in a car’s muffler. So from a distance, it might very well have sounded like an explosion. If you drive out here with your sirens blaring, you’re just going to feel stupid.”
Since they explained it away so smoothly, they likely had a thick manual prepared for how to act in all sorts of situations. Or maybe they had hired an expert at making excuses like a company’s corporate lawyer.
But the fact that they were making those excuses meant the factory was still working to deal with it all. The situation had yet to calm down, so there would be holes in their security.
Kyousuke decided they could get inside without issue like this.
But then static ran through the voices coming from his smartphone.
Then he heard the sound of wet rubber scraping along the ground.
It was just like a child’s rain boots stepping on the wet asphalt.
“……”
Librarian-chan silently turned toward the sound.
It was a few meters behind them.
Visibility was poor thanks to the smokescreen Kyousuke had created, but they could still see a silhouette two sizes smaller than the adults running around.
The silhouette wore a raincoat and held a broken umbrella.
They could not tell if it was facing them or facing away from them and they could not even tell if it really had a head.
It was the Rainy Girl.
The ghost simply appeared and did not speak a word.
“Let’s go,” said Kyousuke. “Just chasing after her won’t get us any closer to the truth. That’s why you decided to come to this factory, right?”
A small door for the night hours was installed on the wall next to an automatic glass door that was covered with metal bars. They stepped inside through that. Surprisingly, they first found themselves in a reception area

just like an office building. Even the factory must have cared about its appearance.
They used the building map on the wall to walk down a dark hallway lit only by emergency lighting and to the new production line that was currently running. Unlike a semiconductor plant, there was no clean room on the way. They just had to open a door to reach a production line larger than a school's gym.
It contained extremely long conveyer belts with various sizes of robot arms on either side. Several of them were lined up side by side like a bowling alley. Almost all the work was automated, so it really did remind them of an automobile factory.
However…
"It isn't running. And I don't see anyone around."
"But the motors and cylinders are still warm and newly-made products are left on the conveyer belts. I bet they only temporarily stopped it when everyone left to deal with the fire."
"There's a pamphlet here. It's apparently a mascot doll that links with your smartphone and moves around. Do they really need all this equipment for that…?"
"Toy Dream is involved in this, so they're probably being paid quite a bit for it."
He could not use the flash, but Kyousuke used his smartphone to snap a few pictures of the production line.
Librarian-chan did not know what to do and simply looked around.
"But what does this factory have to do with my sister?"
"That's what we're trying to figure out."
"This production line doesn't have any windows and isn't connected to the outside, so I don't see how it could be related to the rain."
Were they making some kind of secret modification to the products?
Or…
"Related to the rain, huh?"
Kyousuke said that as he lightly touched a piece of machinery located at one end of a conveyer belt. It was larger than the car washes found at gas stations. The mass of metal completely surrounded the conveyer belt and it seemed to drip melted plastic down to create shapes like a pastry chef with whipped cream. This production line did not place it in a metal mold like normal.
"A steam pipe to melt the plastic. That's probably directly connected to a large industrial boiler. …Come to think of it, the factory's roof had several smokestacks."
"Eh? Wait, Shiroyama-kun!?"
Librarian-chan frantically called out to him, but Kyousuke lay face-up on the stopped conveyer belt and shoved his upper body inside the giant machinery.

She knew it had been deactivated, but watching him still brought a crawling sensation to her fingertips.
However, Kyousuke was too focused on his work to think anything of it.
“This smell. Could it be…?”
“What is it?”
“Librarian-chan, can you open the pouch I handed you? There’s a glass tube the size of a pen inside. Hand that to me.”
She did so and he continued with whatever work he was doing inside the machine.
Finally, he pulled his body out, attached a thin cable to the glass tube, and connected that to the bottom of his smartphone.
Then he called someone.
“Lu-san, I’m about to send you the results of some spectral analysis. It’s most likely remnants of the materials used to make Incense Grenades. Those are made to order for each and every summoner, so a close examination of these parameters might turn up some useful information.”
“Okay,” replied Lu Niang Lan. “But don’t forget this means you owe Illegal one. This might lead us to the unknown’s identity.”
“What is all this about?” asked Librarian-chan.
“This machine is connected to the smokestacks via the steam pipe and boiler. And the Rainy Girl is closely linked to the rain. Now, what determines the composition of rain?”
“Do you mean the smoke coming from the smokestacks…?”
“I found something similar to the materials used in the summoning ceremony’s Incense Grenades. And it’s all but confirmed that the Rainy Girl appears when this production line is being tested. The wind carries the smoke over a wide area. That gives us another way of looking at the fact that the rumors have spread throughout Japan…no, throughout the world. I don’t know what role this plays in it, but this is the first step.”
The production line was larger than a school gym, so they could not thoroughly search the entire thing in a short time.
After generally checking over it, they left the production line.
“Where do we go next?”
“This scent… I’ve smelled it before. Yes, I think it was over there…”
Kyousuke turned back the way they had come.
Librarian-chan had not noticed any kind of scent, so she simply followed in confusion.
Kyousuke returned to the main entrance and looked around.
“(This is the place.)”
He started whispering, so Librarian-chan naturally held her breath.
He pressed his ear against one of several metal doors, placed his fingertips on the door’s surface, and waited. He looked a lot like someone from a drama opening a safe with a stethoscope.

“(I can hear two people breathing. They’re discussing something. Even if they’re summoners, I just have to settle this before they can throw an Incense Grenade.)”
“(W-will it actually work out that well?)”
“(The door seems to be locked, but we just have to get them to open it for us.)”
Librarian-chan just about shrieked out loud at that suggestion, but Kyousuke actually knocked violently on the door so the sound echoed all around them.
Then he raised his voice while pressing against the wall next to the door. He mixed in the bits of information they had gathered so far.
“On Hayato-san’s instructions, I’m here to check the security wiring! I need to check each and every room to figure out where the wiring has been cut, so please cooperate. I have the tester with me, so it won’t take long!”
As soon as the doorknob defenselessly turned, the wind whipped up.
Kyousuke pulled his Blood-Sign from his back, swiftly neutralized the two people inside, and bound their hands behind their backs with their belts.
“The security shifts will be back to normal soon, so let’s go over everything we can get our hands on in that time.”
Kyousuke beckoned Librarian-chan inside, shut the door, and locked it from within.
“What is this place?”
The braid and glasses girl looked around the room.
Unlike the production line, all of the machinery had apparently been removed. Instead, a few large tables were lined up and covered with lab equipment like gas burners and flasks. An entire wall had been converted into a whiteboard and it was covered in the straight lines, hexagons, letters, and numbers of chemical formulas.
Overall, it looked like a school’s chemistry room.
Librarian-chan had never been in a “normal” toy factory and thus had nothing to compare this to, but she could still tell this was not a “normal” toy factory.
“That’s a mixture list. Looks like it really is the incense that goes into an Incense Grenade.”
“What is this stuff that looks like weird grass, white powder, or crushed and transparent rock candy? These aren’t the same as some weird herbs, are they?”
“We can ask these two for details.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke used the tip of his Blood-Sign to tap the forehead of one of the men in lab coats.
The lab coat man groaned and came to.
“Nn, what…? Dammit, my arms… Who are you peop-…gh!?”
Before his question could change to a shout, Kyousuke pressed the Blood-Sign against his throat to keep him from breathing properly.
Kyousuke looked down on the man and asked a question.

“What were you doing here?”
“Hgh, cough! D-do you really think I’ll talk? I don’t know where you’re from, but you can’t escape now. A turnaround victory will come to me if just wait here.”
“So how many of those wonderful soldiers of yours are there? Ten? Fifty?”
“Heh.”
“If it’s more than a hundred…do you really think I’ll care if I lose one or two of you?”
The lab coat man fell silent.
An unpleasant sweat poured from his face and his eyeballs rolled around to look up at Kyousuke.
“I-I wouldn’t recommend that.”
“Why not?”
“T-t-torture isn’t as easy as people think. Hitting someone doesn’t guarantee you’ll get accurate information. Ha…ha ha. If you kill me here, you won’t get the information you want.”
“Sh-Shiroyama-kun…!? You can’t do that!!”
Librarian-chan had been listening from his side, but she had gone pale and she cut in with a shout.
The lab coat man grinned.
He had predicted this, so Kyousuke’s expression remained entirely composed as she spoke.
“Librarian-chan.”
“Wh-what? I…I won’t help you with any kind of violence. Maybe it’s a little late to say that, but torture or whatever is differe-…”
“Sorry.”
With a quiet sound, the Blood-Sign’s flat tip cleanly buried itself in the girl’s solar plexus.
There was no scream.
Her body collapsed to the floor and stopped moving.
Then Kyousuke turned back.
“Now, then. The last bit of conscience holding me back is gone.”
“…!!!???”
The human mind could grow accustomed to even the strongest of stimuli if the same situation continued long enough, but it would raise the white flag in no time if there was more variation. Haunted houses did not have ghosts appearing nonstop from the entrance to the exit. They would also occasionally have needlessly long hallways and corners with no trap set up. This was the same.
“I-I won’t tell you anything. Either way, you aren’t skilled enough to get me to talk!”
“Oh, I won’t be the one doing it.”
Kyousuke lifted the man’s chin with the tip of the Blood-Sign.

“This is Phosphorus, a Repliglass Blood-Sign. It isn’t just a stick. It can move around like a snake, so if I shove it in your mouth, how do you think it’s going to move around inside your body before coming out again?”
“……That’s not possible.”
“This is second-hand information from Illegal, but apparently people can survive that. Then again, it is only second-hand information, so it might not be true. And maybe I just won’t be able to do it properly.”
“Bgrfgh!? Vah, wait, I’ll talk, I’ll talk, I’ll hyalk!?”
Kyousuke merely traced the tip of the Blood-Sign along the lab coat man’s far-from-clean lips and he started crying like a baby.
Kyousuke asked a question without any change of expression.
“Tell me what you know and keep it concise.”
“Th-this factory was bought. It was hijacked. The owner was supposed to be persuaded with a payment of 300 million yen, but he still wouldn’t agree. We started spreading money around his surroundings and more than a hundred of his friends and acquaintances gave us his personal information. It wasn’t hard to take him out after that.”
“…”
“It was a job! In Illegal, the rules of the team or family are more important than the country’s laws. If we mess up, those rules mean we’ll be executed or become nothing more than a number doing hard labor. The normal news calls it confinement or murder. Once a decision is made, we can’t disobey!”
“What was all this for?”
“The smokestacks. This factory is a frontline base for spreading a thin amount of incense over a wide area using the smokestacks. If it gets into the westerlies, it will cross national borders and cover most of the Northern Hemisphere.”
Was that connected to the Rainy Girl who appeared on rainy nights?
The incense diluted into the atmosphere would be concentrated in the raindrops that poured down onto the earth. That may have created an effect similar to the detonation of an Incense Grenade. And that may have invited in a number of bizarre phenomena across Japan or even the world.
Normally, an Artificial Sacred Ground would remove the “clog” that allowed the ghost to appear, so just setting one up would eliminate the ghost.
But these irregular raindrops may not have been pure or effective enough. And an Artificial Sacred Ground always had the effect of allowing “otherworldly beings” to appear. It was just that a ghost would be eliminated before that effect could be seen. In a “partial” Artificial Sacred Ground that did not eliminate the ghost, the ghost would indeed be able to demonstrate its full power.
(But setting up an Artificial Sacred Ground requires seeing the target with the naked eye. Whose “eye” is at work here?)
Kyousuke thought for a moment and then pointed at the whiteboard with his thumb.

“Those chemical formulas have the telltale signs of an incense expert named Ellie Slide. I see the designer medicines she likes to use. Is she part of this?”
“The external staff handled that. They were only hired to complete the chemical formulas and we already paid them at the wharf. Paid them with metal drums and asphalt, that is.”
That was a very Illegal way of doing things.
Kyousuke suppressed the urge to forget the rules and smash the man’s head in.
“What are the incense’s traits? Who was it mixed for?”
“For no one.”
The lab coat man’s lips twisted into a smile as he sat on the floor.
“It’s a universal incense that matches anyone. But that detracts from the overall scent, so it can’t be used to summon a normal Material.”
“Then what is it for?”
“…”
“I want to hear about the Rainy Girl too. Even if this is accidentally creating an Artificial Sacred Ground, someone would still need to see the target with the naked eye. Who is it? Whose eye are you using?”
“Just so you know…this is in everyone’s best interest.”
The lab coat man suddenly said something strange.
“You might not understand now, but the time will come when you’ll thank us. That’s the sort of proposition we’re dealing with. There’s no room for personal feelings here.”
“Do you really think I can accept that answer?”
“If you don’t, I guess you’ll have to think of some other way. Oh, dammit.”
A moment later, a loud sound came from the lab coat man’s mouth.
He had stuck his tongue out and used his full jaw strength to bite off his own tongue.
And he would have succeeded had Kyousuke not noticed and stick the tip of his Blood-Sign inside the man’s mouth.
“!?”
Before the lab coat man could do anything more, Kyousuke slammed his knee against the man’s forehead. With a dull sound, the man somersaulted backwards and passed out.
“I guess that’s all I’m getting…”
Kyousuke thought about this new information as he woke up Librarian-chan who was still collapsed on the floor and stuck his knee into her back until she got up.
This was a universal incense that could not summon a Material.
They were using the large factory’s smokestacks and the westerlies to spread it over the entire Northern Hemisphere.
But what for?

Part 6

Two people were speaking.
A three story atrium space formed a large square directly above the production line. It was the production management room that monitored the entire line. The primary wall was made of glass, but there was little meaning in looking below with the naked eye. The countless consoles and LCD screens by the walls were more important.
However, these two were not monitoring the products.
They were monitoring the smokestacks.
One of them was Yasuzumi Hayato.
The other was Benikomichi Fuuki.
“We’ve used up 80% of our inventory now. It’s about time, mistress. We had set the dissemination amounts with room for having a bit of ‘fun’, so we should be ready to go now. The plan will succeed even if we start a little early.”
“Most likely. But this took longer than I thought. A lot of it caked onto the inside of the smokestacks.”
“It’s still enough. We only have an early weather map, but it should be accurate. The rainclouds are changing form in a way that blatantly ignores the normal rules. It will form the giant magic circle just fine.”
A short silence followed.
The student council girl who was also an assassin’s vessel sat directly on the edge of a console rather than in a chair.
“Now we’ve taken a different path than ‘him’.”
“My dad took the wrong path. That’s why he died.”
“I’m still not certain of that.”
“Then I’ll show you the truth, mistress. When this plan succeeds, we will have a world without death.”
“A world without death, hm?”
“The idea itself is simple, but the effect will be truly impressive. Every single human problem will be solved all at once. That will be our victory.”
“Just to be sure, the Artificial Sacred Ground really will cover the entire planet, right?”
“And permanently. We can start with the Northern Hemisphere. The rest will either go along with it or fight it. And if they fight it, we can just ignore them and let the flow of time drive them to extinction. And once the Southern Hemisphere has gone extinct, we can use factories there for a second dissemination to truly cover the entire planet.”
“And then all of humanity will be contained in their own protective circles.”

“That circle protects the summoner from all external threats and all internal threats such as illness and their own lifespan. It only lasts about ten minutes with a normal Incense Grenade, but our method is different. It will be permanent or at least semi-permanent because it’s a plain and universal incense that can affect anyone.”
“But the protective circle is made from a portion of the Material’s power. Even with an Unexplored-class, protecting all six or seven billion people on the planet won’t be easy.”
“Unless we use *that*.”
“Do you really think we can control *that*?”
“How many hypotheses do you think we have worked through to that end, mistress? Our method is perfect.”
Assassin Hayato smiled thinly as he leaned against the door.
And a mere five centimeters away, on the other side of the door, Shiroyama Kyousuke silently eavesdropped on their conversation.
It was far too unrealistic.
Their master plan was so megalomaniacal he wanted to laugh out loud.
A world without death.
Next to Kyousuke, Librarian-chan was unsure how to react as she whispered to him.
“(This is a joke, right? A world without death? What are they talking about? It was enough of a surprise to hear they were assassins, but this is just too much.)”
“(The problem is that it checks out on a theoretical level.)”
Kyousuke tilted his smartphone on its side and held it out toward the door as he answered.
“(Unlike a vessel, a summoner doesn’t need any inborn talent. *That means anyone can become one.* If they designate a large number of people as summoners for a single ceremony, set up an Artificial Sacred Ground over an extremely wide area, surround them all in protective circles…and set that up to continue indefinitely, then everyone on the planet will be made artificially immortal.)”
They did not have time for a detailed investigation here, so he was recording everything he could.
Based on the voices, at least one of the people speaking was near the door or leaning against it. If Kyousuke opened the door even a crack, they would notice, but if they moved from the door, Kyousuke wanted to record a video of them speaking.
Even now, he could hear the young boy and girl speaking on the other side of the door.
“*That* is of course powerful, but also fickle. She is a lot like a plasma fusion reactor with no guarantee of safety.”
“But placing everyone in a protective circle without giving them a vessel requires a bit of risk. And I have separated her mind from her body,

mistress. I doubt she can wield her power of her own free will at the moment.”
“I just hope she really can be contained within the framework of human understanding.”
“Power can be controlled. That is true even of a sun and of a black hole. Mankind had its victory over the monsters from the moment we defined the Third Summoning Ceremony. This won’t be a problem.”
Their universal incense was not limited to a specific summoner and could not summon a normal Material.
They had a Material that could create protective circles for all seven billion people on the face of the earth.
The extremely high power needed for that was too much for even the average Unexplored-class.
(What? What are they talking about?)
An unpleasant sweat began to pour down Kyousuke’s face like his skin was being roasted.
It was possible he already knew the answer.
It was possible his entire being simply wanted to reject it.
A moment later, a lovely face appeared on the smartphone screen he held in front of him. It seemed to be peering in from the side.
<They are talking about me. My. Dear. Brother☆>
“……!!!???”
He just about lost sight of the current situation and screamed.
It took all his strength to hold his breath and silently back away.
The small screen displayed a girl with waist-length silver twintails and a pure white outfit that resembled a wedding dress.
She was an incarnation of benevolence.
She was a symbol of sanctity.
She was a personification of radiance.
She was an absolute white that did not allow for even a drop of impurity.
She was the strongest of the strong that far surpassed the Regulation-class, the Divine-class, the Unexplored-class, and even the Three.
“(The White…Queen!?)”
The “White” Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth (iu – nu – fb – a – wuh – ei –kx – eu – pl – vjz).
She had exceptional power even among the Unexplored-class that existed beyond the gods of legend. She alone held the name of “absolute”. And she was the Material that was always found at the center of conflict on a global scale.
She was a monster that would smile as she trampled over all the human good and evil that mankind had spent so much time and effort building up.
Her strength had also driven people to madness.
Kyousuke was not about to treat those assassins as victims because of this, but the Queen was the one behind it all.

Despite his extreme panic, Shiroyama Kyousuke still stood in front of Librarian-chan who simply stood there in confusion.
<Hee hee. There is no need to look so surprised. I cannot interfere physically right now. …*That said,* there is only so far I can continue to interpret jealousy as a way of spicing up our love.>
But something was not right.
Confused, Kyousuke looked back and forth between the smartphone screen and the actual scenery.
The smartphone definitely showed that greatest and worst of the Materials, but no one actually stood in front of the door.
It was like a strange sort of ghost video, or…
“(Is this…AR?)”
<Technically, I believe it is known as a perception network. It uses the city’s network and the AR is just one of its uses.>
The Queen gave a sparkling wink and blew him a kiss on the screen.
<When those two were referring to “that”, they meant me. And it seems this White Queen has been built in as a foundation for their world without death. As a safety measure, the mind you are speaking with now has been separated from the body that acts as the source of my power.>
“(Materials don’t show up on digital cameras and sensors. The network shouldn’t be able to recognize you.)”
<That is only when we are inside an Artificial Sacred Ground. Of course, the entire Northern Hemisphere is about to be covered in a thin Artificial Sacred Ground, but with that mixture of incense, setting up the protective circles will be the most they can manage since they don’t need it to interfere all that much. Plus, my main body was summoned with an entirely different method.>
“…”
<Well, boredom is the greatest sin. They probably think I will lend them my body without bothering to break free of their cage if they let me behave as I please.>
“(What method did they use?)”
<Urashima Tarou, Kaguya-hime, Penglai Island, the Fairy Kingdom, Orpheus, Izanagi, and I believe there was a similar story in Ancient Mexico too. Surely that was enough to clue you in, brother.>
“(The End of the World…hm?)”
In Toy Dream 35, Azalea Magentarain and the rest of Guard of Honor had caused trouble using the old concept of the fairy’s spring.
The End of the World was another well-known concept that had thoroughly permeated the minds of normal people who knew nothing of the summoning ceremony.
There were stories that miracles, objects, foods, or other things no human could reproduce could be found beyond the sea, beyond the mountains, beyond the sky, or anywhere else people could not reach. In most cases, it was said that arriving there or returning from there would conquer death.

Which meant…
“(If it can be called the End of the World, it can’t be somewhere touched by human hands.)”
<Correct. Just like the cat in the box, the conditions collapse once it is opened by human hands.>
“(Where exactly is it?)”
<Do you really think you can get everything you want out of me? Whether it is a physical object or information, since I was summoned outside of the Blood-Sign system, there was no compensation required as a safety device when summoning me.>
The White Queen seemed to be enjoying herself.
Kyousuke narrowed his eyes a little. He knew he was only looking at an image displayed on the screen, but he still moved silently to better protect Librarian-chan. He knew the Queen was liable to order him to kill his vessel just to make him suffer. And if he refused, she might very well use every underhanded method available to overturn all assumptions and kill the girl herself.
Depending on the situation, she was a much more pressing threat than even the assassins on the other side of the door.

<Hee hee hee. Then how about you take an artificial photograph with me? And then you can use it as your phone's background. The fact that I'm accessing your phone like this means I already have your address. Oh, it feels so much like we're lovers☆>
"…"
<Wait just a second, brother. If you throw this smartphone against the floor, everyone in the building will hear.>
The world was clearly ending when the White Queen was the sensible one.
<Brother. Did you miss the reference I made just a moment ago?>
The White Queen smiled on the small screen as she gave the answer.
Her slender finger pointed straight up.
<Kaguya-hime.>

Part 7

Toy Dream OP-01 to Toy Dream OP-07 were all civilian space stations.
But there was one other station that had been used only in the early demonstration experiments and was currently abandoned. OP-XX.
It now silently orbited the blue planet as a giant coffin.

Part 8

"(How could this happen?)" muttered Kyousuke.
The White Queen did not seem to mind.
<In true Illegal fashion, they used vulture funds to buy a civilian spaceship company. They used that technology to contact the abandoned station and modify it to their liking.>
"…"
<That means my body is enjoying a flight near the moon. Perhaps you could call this a digital out-of-body experience. Brother, you and your surroundings are out of my reach. Unlike the Sewn Realm Summoning that Guard of Honor organization used in this city before, this will not summon Materials without end. For one thing, this was running experimentally even as Guard of Honor summoned me into that cocoon to have me all to

themselves. This is really just the dregs of my power, so don't you think you can let your guard down?>
"(Like I can believe that. If you wanted to, you could use an explosion in orbit to crash the entire station into the earth.)"
<Hee hee. You really are a cowardly little rabbit, brother☆ But that's what makes you so adorable.>
It did not matter where exactly the Queen was.
She could smash the entire world to pieces as long as she had appeared somewhere in the world, wherever that might be.
Kyousuke agonized over the fact that no one seemed to understand that.
Did Yasuzumi Hayato and Benikomichi Yuuki really think they could control her?
"(But the End of the World, huh?)"
That phrase may have contained a small hint of hope.
Even if they were his enemy, he hoped beyond hope they would actually control her.
Never mind the fact that he knew that was hopeless.
<It is a different method from the one you used in the past, brother, but there were something similar in your ideas file, wasn't there?>
"(That was just an empty theory. It seems to make sense, but I doubt it would actually work.)"
<They take everything needed to summon me, close it up in a box, and send it somewhere no one can reach. No one knows if I was summoned or not. But that's exactly why it's effective. …That was the idea, right?>
"(Again, it wouldn't work.)"
<That is a matter of perception, brother. Because you are so extremely skilled, you notice the true faults without even opening the box. That is why it fails for you. But most others don't. If there is an egg, they innocently believe a chick will hatch from it. Only the hen knows just how hard it is to keep that egg stable and warm. …And that ignorance provides the power needed to force this method to work.>
"…"
The fact remained that the White Queen was here before his eyes.
Even if the method was wrong, she remained in this world by force.
Who was the truly frightening one here? Hayato and Benikomichi Fuuki for carrying out the plan or the White Queen for going along with it on a whim?
<See, see? And by that theory, I couldn't hurt a fly while separated from my body like this. So stop giving me that unpleasant look and start flirting with this harmless and powerless version of me☆>
Kyousuke refused to believe it so easily.
For one thing…
"(Why are you helping humans? A space station? The End of the World? If you wanted to, you could easily break free of that manmade cage.)"

<It seems “this” is the safety method to keep that from happening. By binding my body but giving my mind freedom, they hope I won’t get bored. As long as I’m happy, I won’t go on a rampage.>
“(That doesn’t explain anything. You’re the strongest of the strong, so I can’t imagine why you would obey anyone else.)”
<Because I knew you would show up before long if I did this. In that way, they passed with flying colors.>
A sweetness even more concentrated than gum syrup could be seen in her carefree smile.
There was affection there, but also something unhealthy that felt like it would burn his chest if he so much as licked at it.
“(Why are they trying to create a world without death? Do they have a good enough reason to explain your cooperation?)”
<How many times do I have to tell you I’m not interested in the human world? As long as you were going to show up, brother, nothing else mattered. As for them, they’re looking at this in a Mahayana way more than a Sthaviravada way.>
“(The salvation…of all mankind?)”
<It really is nothing more than that. Isn’t it ironic for a group of assassins to create a paradise that rejects all forms of death?>
Librarian-chan had fallen silent for a while.
She did not want her sister’s ghost to appear all over the place and she herself had nearly been killed by that ghost.
But were the people in this factory really doing anything wrong?
A world without death.
An age in which everyone was immortal.
If that was possible…
“(It would lead to hell on earth. Do they actually understand that?)”
Kyousuke’s words stabbed into Librarian-chan’s chest.
He had likely been speaking to the White Queen, but it had been enough to tear away Librarian-chan’s naïve thoughts as she listened in.
“(Civilization is built on the assumption that people die. For example, people don’t commit crimes because they’re afraid of being executed. Countries don’t start wars because they don’t want a ton of their people to die. That’s just how we think. When you get down to it, people go along with civil rights and environmental protection because the alternative could threaten their lives. But all of that will crumble in a world without death. …If that age arrives too suddenly, all the safeties we’ve put in place will fail. Kind metropolises will transform into post-apocalyptic ruins in no time.)”
<Brother. How much work do you think people have put into building up civilization this far?>
The White Queen sounded like she was questioning his sanity.
And she continued in a graceful, insane voice.
<People tend to only remember the four great ancient civilizations. There were many others and people lived happily there with smiles on their faces,

but no one remembers their names. Civilizations are no more valuable than that. So why get so worked up over them?>
“(This is on another level entirely. This planet truly will be covered in desert.)”
<The age of the dinosaurs was covered in ice and came to an end. But does anyone now feel any pain for them while using their oil?>
“(But this time no one will be able to die as it happens!! This could lead to an age in which seven billion starving people crawl around a desert planet! And it will continue for centuries, millennia, and all eternity!!)”
“…”
Librarian-chan could not bring herself to speak.
She finally understood why Kyousuke had called it a living hell.
A world of no restraint and no benevolence. All cities would crumble, all nature would vanish, and only scorching deserts would remain.
Nevertheless, they would be unable to die and forced to crawl around as dried-up mummies, searching for even the slightest puddle.
Death would become an unreachable hope.
It truly was the hell seen in picture books.
And instead of being sent to hell, hell would come to this world.
“(You knew it would turn out like that, didn’t you?)”
<Of course I did.>
“(You knew, but you didn’t correct their mistake! You just smiled and pretended to obey them as they dreamed of their paradise without giving it any real thought!!)”
<Why wouldn’t I? As long as I have you, brother, mankind and the planet are of no consequence.>
Her intoxicated voice was that of a dreaming maiden.
The loveliness of her face and voice made her unbelievably hideous to Kyousuke.
When people did evil deeds out of malice, one only had to remove that malice. But the White Queen could not be persuaded or threatened. She could not be controlled through external stimuli.
<More importantly, are you going to be okay, brother?>
“(What are you talking about?)”
<They are referring to this battle as “mankind’s final death”, so they will not feel even a twinge of guilt. That means they will not hold back as long as the situation warrants it.>
Kyousuke looked to the door.
He had thought Hayato and Benikomichi Fuuki would attack if they noticed him here.
But he had been wrong.
<Brother, you seem to think it was your skill that allowed you to sneak in this far, but it would be more accurate to say you were following the bread crumbs left for you. And while they are a summoner and vessel, they are

assassins first and foremost. If they have a surefire way to kill, there is no reason for them to stick to the summoning ceremony.>
“(It can’t be…)”
<As long as they lured you deep into this giant factory – yes, about fifty steps away from the exit – their victory was assured. I thought that sounded quite boring, but what do you think?>
“It can’t be!!”

Part 9

A moment later, more than three hundred plastic explosives attached to the factory’s primary columns and rebar detonated all at once.

Part 10

Rather than being crushed, the building seemed to have been blown to pieces by firecrackers pointed straight up.
Hayato was more than five hundred meters away as he held the wireless detonator, but pieces of concrete still fell near him.
There was no disguising this as something else, so firetruck and ambulance sirens were sounding here and there.
He spoke with a composed look on his face.
“It’s over.”
“That’s right,” replied his vessel Benikomichi Fuuki.
They had blown up a factory filled with more than a hundred of their men, but they did not seem to care.
Then who were the two people inside the factory’s production management room?
The answer was simple: body doubles.
“It’s sad losing someone to speak with. After all, she could perfectly disguise herself as me. I’ve never met anyone who understood me so well.”
“But these were the final sacrifices. It all leads to the world without death.”

And it was thanks to those sacrifices that Shiroyama Kyousuke and his vessel had focused so much on infiltration that they let down their guard in a way.
The sacrifices had been necessary.
They had been mankind's final sacrifices.
As far as they could see while monitoring from a distance, Kyousuke had not set up an Artificial Sacred Ground. That meant the Material and protective circle could not have saved them from harm. Summoners could cause damage exceeding the laws of physics, but they were normal humans if they did not follow the proper process. Normal explosives would kill them like normal.
The standard Incense Grenade was set to detonate three to five seconds after pulling the pin, so it was too late to start once the explosions had already begun.
They had either been torn to mincemeat or they were crushed beneath the rubble.
"Whatever the case, the necessary amount of incense is already in the air. We just need to buy another dissemination factory within five years."
"What do you think, Hayato? We didn't get enough work out of the factory, so it's hard to say its products reached all mankind. …I doubt we made the connection there."
"It doesn't matter if we didn't. Creating our immortal group comes first. After that, the passage of time will put us in control. Everyone else will only have two options: be exterminated or join the undying. Then our world without death will be complete."
Hayato stopped speaking for a moment and then forced out some more.
"Okay, mistress. Let's add the finishing touches."
"Yes," replied the vessel girl. "We've sprinkled the oil on the straw. Once we set it alight, no one can stop us."

Part 11

The entire area had become a pile of rubble.
It had originally been a giant factory, but that had thoroughly crumbled into a pile over ten meters high.
The scene looked hopeless at first, but there was a surprising escape route.
The inside had not been entirely crushed, so it was now something like a vast labyrinth
"Dammit…"

Kyousuke cursed as he crawled out into the rain that had resumed pouring outside.
He held Librarian-chan's limp form in his arms.
A few dozen firetrucks and ambulances were gathered out front. Their red lights were flashing all around. The pressure that should have kept them away was no longer functioning.
With Librarian-chan still in his arms, Kyousuke turned back toward the pile of rubble.
"How many people were buried alive in there…?"
<Eh heh heh. Did I come in handy?>
Even now, the White Queen was laughing.
She had already left his smartphone's screen.
A life-size version of the White Queen stood next to Kyousuke as an image projected on the raindrops.
"The Rainy Screen, hm?"
He received a response from the directional speakers that were used to make the voice data sound like it was coming from the projected image.
The White Queen clasped her hands behind her back and moved her chin in needlessly close.
<Well, you can say it's an alliance, but it's really a master/servant relationship. And this was just a dull way of proving that. So on the way back to Toy Dream 35, you can take a look at every high-resolution nook and cranny of my youthful body.>
When she passed right through Kyousuke, the Queen puffed out her cheeks.
The bombs had been set up to destroy the massive factory's most important structural points. But that meant the blast spreading within the factory was not evenly distributed and it was thus weaker in places.
Kyousuke and Librarian-chan had quickly hid in one of those "air pockets" to escape the danger.
But not even Kyousuke could make those calculations on such short notice. Searching out all the bombs in that instant would have been impossible. Without help from the White Queen who had seen where the bombs were in advance, he would not have even had the necessary data for the calculations.
"Were you hoping I would thank you? After you just let this happen?"
<Then I will serve you to my utmost until you do thank me. How about this?>
The White Queen projected on the night rain spoke with the expression of a girl opening a homemade lunch in front of the boy she had a crush on.
To her, this may not have been much different.
<Their deathless world requires more than just disseminating a special substance through the air. That is the only the setup. It needs to treat every human on the planet like a summoner, but the general public isn't aware of the summoning ceremony. So for the very final step, those expert summoners must ignite everything with a special ignition switch.>

“…”
If they could stop that ignition, they could prevent the world without death from being constructed.
“Rain and factory smoke, linking the people who bought the character goods with the factory’s activity, the End of the World, and the final ignition…”
Kyousuke muttered to himself and the White Queen waved her index finger in front of his face.
<Eh heh heh. Yes, I knew you wouldn’t need me to give you the answer after that hint, brother. Now, now. I’m looking forward to your valiant effort.>
The Queen’s image grew badly distorted with static. That continued for about ten seconds before returning to normal.
Kyousuke heard a wet sound like a child’s rain boots scraping against the wet asphalt.
He slowly turned around.
Since Librarian-chan was unconscious, he could face this ghost without seeing it through her emotional filter.
He found a small silhouette quite nearby. A broken umbrella hid the face of a girl in a bloody raincoat who was between ten and twelve. She was the Rainy Girl. She was Librarian-chan’s sister and was supposedly plotting to kill that girl who rejoiced at being able to live on her own.
This was not the same as the fake Rainy Screen.
This was a mistake that appeared in the world itself.
He could only see her lips and they were moving silently.
Librarian-chan had been terrified from beginning to end, but when he calmly observed her, he could read her lips.
This is what she was trying to say: *Save my sister’s world.*
When had this ghost realized the truth?
And to how many people had she tried to tell the truth?
She had not been appearing to kill Librarian-chan.
Even after death, she had been wandering the earth in order to protect her family.
<Eh heh heh. Did you let her go because you realized this from the beginning, brother?>
“I’m not that perfect. I just thought the Rainy Girl’s actions weren’t focused enough for me to accept what Librarian-chan said at face value. If I hadn’t heard this here, I might have taken Librarian-chan’s side and helped eliminate the ghost.”
At the very least, the summoner and vessel advocating a world without death had seen the Rainy Girl as a danger. They had gone as far as bugging Librarian-chan’s house or modifying the communications equipment nearby.
They had not directly killed Librarian-chan because the Rainy Girl had been fixated on her sister. It was a lot like the relationship between Kyousuke and the White Queen. If they got rid of Librarian-chan, they would no longer

be able to predict the Rainy Girl’s actions. That was why they had left her alive.
Ghastly wide eyes peered out from the gaps in the torn umbrella.
It was true that ghost did not look normal.
Given how she had died, some might have screamed as soon as they saw her face.
But that was not the girl’s fault.
That did not explain why that girl would be malicious.
In the end, the Rainy Girl had only been focused on the nearby people she cared about. But no one had noticed and she had become the star of a ghost story.
<What are you going to do, brother?>
The White Queen seemed to be enjoying herself.
She asked despite knowing the answer.
And that was why the boy responded as if to confirm what she already knew.
He had been asked to save someone and Alice (with) Rabbit could only give one answer when he had heard those cursed words.
“My answer is of course, ‘as you wish’.”

Investigation Records of a Certain Pair of Twins 03

When people fall asleep on the last train or on a train that begins deadheading, they go missing and never return. But for some reason, the fact that people are vanishing never ends up in the news.
The rumor had branched off into a number of forms, so some had a less frightening conclusion: a reunion with a forgotten first love, the return of a runaway pet, or the discovery of a lost treasure, but that only made it less credible.
I started to drift off on the train and suddenly woke up to find I was the only one onboard. I was too scared to see if anyone was in the driver’s compartment up front. As I trembled in fear, I blinked and suddenly found myself back on the train full of other passengers. I thought I had just woken up from a dream, but what if I have been wandering through a dream ever since? Or…?
As the planner viewed the scene, he complained into his cellphone: ‘Your huge-ass sign is in the way, so no one can see our advertisement from the station.’ When the construction workers checked the plans back in their

office, they all tilted their heads. There shouldn’t have been a giant sign there, so what was this guy seeing?

Meinokawa Higan woke up to someone violently shaking her shoulders. She shrieked when she realized it was a middle-aged worker and not her “sister”.
The man with stubble on his chin just looked annoyed.
“How long are you planning to sleep? I’m amazed those cleaning brushes whirring around outside weren’t enough to wake you. If I hadn’t done one last check through the cars, the shutters would’ve closed and you’d have been trapped on the monorail.”
“Eh, ah!? Um, where’s my sister…?”
“Your sister? Oh, please don’t tell me there’s someone else hiding in here.”
The annoyance in his voice suggested he really knew nothing about that.
Higan shook her heavy head and pulled out the cheap cellphone that matched the one her “sister” had. It was already past ten and both calling and emailing received no response.
“Hey, can you get off the train before messing with your phone? I really want to lock up and get home.”
“O-oh. Sorry.”
“I can’t believe this. Now I have to check back over everything for that sister of yours.”
The worker complained as he left the monorail. Higan started to follow, but she nearly “fell”. Unlike at a station, the switchyard had no platform and thus there was a one meter drop. It was easily overcome if you knew it was there, but it could lead to a broken arm if it caught someone off guard.
The man supported her with surprisingly quick movements.
“Watch out! If there’s an accident here, I might be held responsible. Please give me a break!!”
“S-sorry.”
He was being a little cruel, but from his perspective, Higan was a step away from being a trespasser. No one would want to be responsible for the actions of someone like that.
She moved away from the worker and looked around.
Monorail cars hung down from the parallel rails running along near the ceiling. There were also garage-like shutters and large maintenance equipment. It was a vast space, but it was all indoors and the rain could not get in.
There were a few other men and women in work uniforms, but it was a small number for such a large space. It felt more like they were the few remaining workers rather than the full workforce. They might have been “closing up shop” as it was called.
And there was no sign of a shrine maiden outfit’s noticeable red color scheme.

Higan walked around unsteadily, left the switchyard through a door, and entered a narrow passageway. She felt around as she continued. Finally, she opened a stainless steel door and stepped outside.
She was nearly blinded by the bright decorative lights.
Toy Dream 35 was always filled with colorful lights, but a special event known as the Rainy Screen was underway to keep guests around during the long rain. That was why a “surface” of light burned into her eyes like a movie screen.
“Where did Renge go?”
The girl had not been in the switchyard, but Higan did not know where she had gone. She had no idea what to do, but then an odd sound reached her ears.
“…ga…”
It was strangely scratchy and she did not even realize it was a voice at first. But…
“Hi…n…”
“Ren…ge?”
As soon as she said that, she heard another sound.
The disturbing sound reminded her of rubber scraping against the rainy road.
“…”
Meinokawa Higan silently turned around.
She did so ever so slowly.
And there she found…

Facts

- Summoner Hayato and Vessel Benikomichi Fuuki are pursuing a world without death that will be created by a worldwide Artificial Sacred Ground and seven billion protective circles. If all mankind is placed inside a protective circle within that semi-permanent Artificial Sacred Ground, it will theoretically create a deathless world that rejects all external and internal death.
- Hayato’s group used the factory’s smoke to place a special substance in the westerlies. And by placing the factory’s products in people’s hands the world over, they forcibly involved them in a portion of the summoning ceremony.
- The Material at the core of the plan is the White Queen. Her body is in space and her mind alone can walk freely on the earth. Thus,

she is currently harmless. However, it is unknown if that balance can be broken.

- The current system of society is built on the assumption that people die and civilization will quickly collapse if people suddenly stop dying. Hayato’s group either has not realized this or is trying not to think about it.
- In a system not reliant on the Artificial Sacred Ground, Materials can be picked up by cameras and sensors.
- The Rainy Girl ghost had noticed some of what was going on and was trying to give a warning to protect her sister and the small world around her, but that warning did not reach anyone.
- To create the world without death, Hayato must activate some final ignition.
- The White Queen super loves her super super brother. But that super super super love is super super super super scary.

Stage 04: Even If It Isn’t Right

「これが絶対的な間違いと罵られようが、

盛大な茶番劇と嘲られようが」

「本当は、誰だって！　こうしたかったに決まっているだろう!!」

(Stage 04 Open 05/01 01:07)

ステージ04

たとえ、正しくなかったとしても

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Some might say this is absolutely wrong and some might say it’s a grand farce.”
“But!! This has to be what everyone really wanted to do!!”
(Stage 04 Open 05/01 01:07)
Even If It Isn’t Right

Part ?

From an undated voice recorder file:
My dad’s method must have been wrong.
By providing death and eliminating people, he worked to remove the dangerous elements and thus improve the world. But if he missed even a single person, he could no longer maintain the “proper history”. That single point would spread to the whole and the distortion of “history” would never end.
That is why you can’t build peace on a foundation of death.
Even if you do build that peace, it will not last.
We corrected that method.
Instead of accepting death, we will utterly reject it. By creating a world without death, people will lose the very reason for their conflict. Most human conflict is based on an unfulfilled need. And topping that list is the preservation of their own life.
The creation of a world without death will likely create a fair bit of chaos, but the people will soon realize they have no more reason to fight.
Luckily, we have all the tools needed to accomplish this. All that remains is to do it.
There is some fear of unwanted phenomena occurring as a side effect of creating a planet-wide Artificial Sacred Ground and placing all of mankind inside protective circles, but establishing the world without death comes first.
Once that is complete and all conflict has left the human world, I will finally have the right to inherit everything my dad left behind.
Killer Intent Antenna.
Telomere’s End.
That is when I will inherit those two names.
Then again, they might have lost all meaning by the time we have a world without death. In that case, they will only be a legacy I inherit from my father.
Fuuki-san.

She was a vessel for the previous generation as well, but she alone may still have value in the world without death.

Part 2

“Oh, goddammit!!” shouted the modified China dress beauty named Lu Niang Lan.
She was in Aika’s apartment and they must have reached a break in the rain because she could not see any out the window. However, she could not see the starry sky either. Was that due to the thick rainclouds or Toy Dream 35’s Rainy Screen campaign?
The white liger must not have liked the moisture because she looked a little upset as she gave a large, large yawn.
Meanwhile, Shut-In Aika was more cheerful than she had been during the day (although it was hard to tell just by looking at her). She was busy leaning against the ferocious beast while watching a late-night variety show and posting complaints on a message board in real time. But as a summoner who was forgotten when not seen with the naked eye, no one would respond to any of her posts. Her information could not reach anyone without some help from someone below Award 100 who would not be forgotten by normal society. Even if she bought something online, the order would be forgotten if she did not use one of those people.
Lu Niang Lan switched her phone to speakerphone and called someone with the results of her investigation still on the screen.
She was calling Shiroyama Kyousuke.
“I found it, I found it. Hayato was a dead end and the incense registration list didn’t turn up anything, but I finally got a hit with the vessel named Benikomichi Fuuki. She’s registered as one of the vessels paired with a summoner called Illegal Award 910, Telomere’s End.”
“One of…the vessels?”
“Telomere’s End kept several vessel ‘candidates’ on hand. He would bind and cancel contracts over short periods of time to choose the right vessel for the job like a set of golf clubs. Benikomichi Fuuki was one of those. She’s been active since she was nine years old.”
She had been able to stand on the public stage as a high school student council president and blend into human society without anyone forgetting her because she had repeatedly cancelled and renewed her contract like that.

It may have been that history of risky usage that allowed her to do that without fearing the unknown side effects.
It was not that her body had built up a resistance to it. Her mind had.
“So the person trying to create this world without death is that Telomere’s End guy?”
“No, Telomere’s End is already dead,” dryly answered the modified China dress beauty. “After his death, his vessel candidates scattered. Some returned to normal lives and some bound new contracts with other summoners. In the end, none of the vessels stayed with Telomere’s End. … Except for one, that is.”
“And that was senpai…Benikomichi Fuuki? But she has a contract with a summoner other than Telomere’s End, doesn’t she?”
“What if that summoner was a memento of Telomere’s End?”
“…”
“Telomere’s End had brought together a small organization as a member of Illegal. And Illegal families focus on bonds of blood. It might sound odd for criminal organizations to care about familial love, but it’s far deeper and stronger than people think. You could call it an idiosyncrasy of Illegal. … Even if Telomere’s End himself didn’t want it, that would have had some effect.”
Yasuzumi Hayato was his heir from a physical and genetic perspective. Benikomichi Fuuki was his heir from a psychological and technical perspective.
They were trying to follow in the footsteps of Telomere’s End by joining forces. That was the identity of Shiroyama Kyousuke’s enemy.
“Our Awards are mainly dependent on the summoner rather than the vessel. That’s why I’m not Government Award 1000 and why your enemy is on par with Telomere’s End and yet has not inherited his name or Awards. A child does not inherit his parent’s Awards just because he is using the same vessel.”
“That would explain why someone so skilled isn’t in any of the records.” Kyousuke sounded annoyed. “And from what I’ve heard, I don’t think the summoner is in charge here. It’s probably senpai…the vessel who has seen both father and son who is leading the pair. She has given the son some special education to help him learn his father’s techniques.”
“That’s an unusual arrangement. When I was a vessel, I wore a collar and was kept in a cage.”
“I’m not sure how I should respond to that.”
“Feel free to get all flustered while you imagine it,” readily answered Lu Niang Lan. “I don’t mind if it’s you.”
That was something she had already dealt with.
Dealt with by personally killing the summoner behind it, that is.
“As the name Telomere’s End suggests, he was an assassin and he apparently really thought he could bring about peace if he killed everyone

standing in its way. But based on what you've said, Kyousuke-chan, it sounds like his son is heading in the opposite direction."
"When the one-man leader died, it may have cast a shadow over his ideals. That's why they decided to take the other way. If they succeed, they've succeeded. And if they fail, it proves that his father was right all along."
"By the way…there's one thing I need to tell you about and then apologize for."
"Just one?"
" 'Just one'? That's not a very nice thing to say!! …Ahem. Remember when you helped me retrieve that attache case at A Block's international airport?"
"Yeah. The one carrying a plan to defeat a certain country, right?"
"Right. …The thing is, that plan was a lot like this."
"?"
"The method of destroying their assumed enemy nation was just like this deathless world. But instead of creating an indefinite state of immortality, the plan was to only create a temporarily deathless world. Once the nation's system had collapsed, they would switch off the deathless part."
It was simple enough to describe, but what it meant was truly nasty.
The targets themselves would thoroughly destroy the "kind system" that was necessary to preserve their normal lives and then their immortality would suddenly be snatched away from them. What would happen then?
They would no longer have the clothing, food, shelter, currency, electricity, gas, water, and everything else provided by that "kind system", but a world of normal death would suddenly return.
Without what was needed to live, they would of course be unable to live.
Even if that meant one or two hundred million people, there would be no exceptions.
They would have destroyed themselves and driven themselves to death.
It would be mass suicide on a grand scale.
That "peaceful solution" was really a horribly cruel way of destroying a nation without firing a single bullet.
"So that's why Yasuzumi Hayato and Benikomichi Fuuki showed up at that international airport. Had someone intercepted their plan and built it into their own plan or were they trying to prevent a coincidentally similar plan from getting out? Either way, they needed to steal that no matter what. That's why they showed up and pretended to be our allies."
"I'm glad I didn't trust them," commented Kyousuke.
"I know what you mean. It's looking like those so-called Black Wings that occupied the airport may have actually been soldiers from the old Telomere's End days. In that case, simply stealing the case during the first wave would have worked, but if that failed, they just had to slaughter their own soldiers to earn our trust and begin a summoning ceremony from close range."
Lu Niang Lan traversed the world of the summoning ceremony with nothing more than her bare hands and hidden weapons, but not even she could

escape the basic rules. Once she was closed in an Artificial Sacred Ground and her target was contained within a protective circle, none of her attacks would get through.
They might have been in trouble had that second wave tricked them.
“It’s the same method they used when blowing up the factory with their soldiers inside…”
“For advocating a world without death, they sure are quick to take people’s lives, enemy or ally. They’ll probably be the first to ‘starve’ if their plan does succeed.”
“By the way, what are the three major powers doing?”
“They’ll probably take action soon. A world without death sounds nice, but it will only bring harm to everyone. …However, these people planned for your interference from the beginning, so they’ll have put together their timetable on the assumption they were going to blow up their HQ. Their next move will be checkmate, so shouldn’t we assume this will all be over by the time those large organizations get going?”
“In that case, we’ll have to do this on our own.”
“Do you have any idea where their ignition will take place?”
“Yeah. There’s only one place it could be.”

Part 3

Yasuzumi Hayato, the memento of a summoner known as Telomere’s End, looked up into the night sky during a brief break in the rain.
“Do you think they’ll be here?”
“I’m sure they will,” replied Benikomichi Fuuki, his vessel.
She had viewed Telomere’s End’s techniques from closer than anyone and had thoroughly trained this novice summoner in their true essence. She had not demanded it, but her training had been harsh enough that he had naturally started to call her “mistress”.
“First, they know I went through a special process and protected my social status to remain ‘here’. Second, they may have seen the Rainy Girl appear at the factory as well as ‘here’. There are small changes occurring around the world, but the Rainy Girl’s most noticeable actions are concentrated on this city. With those two facts, it should be obvious that the ghost has been appearing near crucial parts of our plan to leave behind some kind of message. He isn’t stupid enough to overlook that.”
“He should have died in the explosion.”

“That would have been best, of course. And it is logically correct. But didn’t I teach you that you will occasionally run across apparent violations of probability – that is, miraculous despair – in actual combat?”
They stood in Toy Dream 35’s R Block.
They were on the roof of the high school were Benikomichi Fuuki served as student council president.
As soon as Shiroyama Kyousuke knew she was his enemy, he would wonder why she had gone to the effort of canceling and renewing her contract as a vessel just to preserve her social standing here.
Unless he sentimentally concluded she had wanted to enjoy her peaceful high school life, he would have predicted that she was modifying the high school as a cornerstone of her plan.
“How is the weather map looking?” asked Benikomichi Fuuki.
“I’m only using a civilian service, but it looks good. The effects are starting to show themselves. The rainclouds are taking a shape that completely ignores the arrangement of wind and atmospheric pressure. The Northern Hemisphere itself is clearly transforming into a giant pattern.”
“In other words, that will give away where the center is. And if it’s that obvious with a civilian service, everyone in the world will know. This creates a third concern. We have two options: complete the ignition before any pursuers arrive…”
She heard a creaking noise.
It was the sound of a steel door opening and closing.
Two more people stepped out onto the late night rooftop.
“Or mow everything down to buy the time we need. Right, Shiroyama Boy?”
The two summoner pairs faced each other.
Shiroyama Kyousuke and the Librarian.
Yasuzumi Hayato and the Student Council President.
They were beginning the final battle over the deathless world a ghost had revealed.

Part 4

When Kyousuke arrived on the roof, his opponents were standing in the rainy night without an umbrella.
They were a little more than twenty meters away.
The summoner known as Alice (with) Rabbit did not ask his opponents why they were doing this and he did not try to talk them out of it. He would stop

them no matter what their reason was and he would use any means necessary to do so. His silence was a sign of that resolve.
But he did recall some small things:
———The student council president who had apologized for making him take part in the useless crime prevention training.
———The girl who had innocently stolen the pork from his bowl in the cafeteria.
———Benikomichi Fuuki who had helped him study to fend off boredom after school.
The memories rose to the surface.
But then he sealed them away as if to part ways with those peaceful days.
Instead, he made a demand.
“Name yourself.”
This was an issue of definitions.
He had been speaking to Yasuzumi Hayato, but the summoner said nothing and looked over to his vessel.
Benikomichi Fuuki answered on her own without checking with the summoner behind her.
“We are Illegal Award 910, Telomere’s End.”
“…”
Shiroyama Kyousuke narrowed his eyes ever-so-slightly.
That quick exchange had revealed the general outline of some things: the balance of power between his two enemies, this plan led by the vessel, what supported the vessel’s heart, and what desire had led them in this direction.
So to sum it all up, Kyousuke spoke a simple phrase with Librarian-chan to his side.
“There’s no saving you.”
A moment later, an Incense Grenade burst at Hayato’s feet.
An Artificial Sacred Ground expanded from there.
The summoning battle had begun.
The Rose made up of 216 Petals appeared. Kyousuke pulled a serpentine Blood-Sign from his back and Hayato pulled a three-sectioned staff of a Blood-Sign from his back. They both became long sticks. They forcefully sent out one of the White Thorns that had appeared. Both White Thorns pierced the Rose at about the same time and it broke into scattering Petals.
Countless Spots appeared within the Artificial Sacred Ground and the Petals were absorbed by them.
Librarian-chan and Benikomichi Fuuki’s bodies transformed as if spiraling around.
Kyousuke had the Original Green (k). Cost: 1. Sound Range: Middle.
Hayato had the Original Red (b). Cost: 1. Sound Range: Low.
They were both three meter, seven hundred kilogram masses of goo and the only difference was the color, but Kyousuke had the upper hand in the sound range.

But Hayato did not quickly build up his Material to change to a different sound range.
As Kyousuke continued to aim for the Petals floating in the air, the assassin gave a yell.
“Fuuki-san!! Destroy the roo-…”
“Like we’ll let you!! Librarian-chan!!”
Kyousuke loudly cut him off.
<Understood. I just have to stop her, right!?>
A dull sound rang out. As Benikomichi Fuuki tried to smash the concrete below them in her Original Red form, Librarian-chan used her own Original Green body as a shield.
Kyousuke had the upper hand in the sound range, so she could take a few hits without worrying about a fatal blow.
In the blank moment created by the failed attempt to destroy their footing, Kyousuke used his Blood-Sign to forcefully hit a White Thorn.
He moved onto the next step.
By gaining an advantage in sound range and cost, he could crush his opponent before they even left the weakest Cost 1 range.
But Hayato gave a shout even though he had to know that.
“Did you think you could get in our way forever!?”
The red goo took the form of a giant fist and repeatedly attacked the rooftop.
<Gh… She’s fast! But her monster should be about the same as mine!!>
Librarian-chan moved quickly, but she could not help but let a few hits through which sent disconcerting cracks through the concrete. The limit arrived in no time. With a dull breaking sound, Kyousuke’s entire vision dropped down as if he had fallen into an enormous pitfall.
He knew what Yasuzumi Hayato had to be thinking.
They would fall into a classroom or hallway. Either way, it was a limited indoor field that would allow him to fight while switching from one foothold to another. By using the floor, the walls, the ceiling, the blackboards, the desks, and the lockers, he could switch between footholds every few seconds to send the artificial gravity every which way and toss Shiroyama Kyousuke around. He could overwhelm his opponent by building up his own Material without giving his opponent a chance to use his Blood-Sign.
But Kyousuke did not just sit idly by.
With a tremendous sound, he pressed his feet against the crumbling rooftop and charged forward like a bullet.
His target was Yasuzumi Hayato himself.
Their protective circles collided, creating an almost metallic clang. The two summoners were distanced from anything that would bring death, so this would of course not defeat him.
But Yasuzumi Hayato’s body still floated up somewhat.
“…?”
“Librarian-chan!! Hit me!!”

<Okay! And my name!!>
The response was swift.
An otherworldly monster mercilessly beat Shiroyama Kyousuke's protective circle from behind. This provided far more power than before, so it almost looked like the physics experiment using metal balls hanging from strings. All of the monster's kinetic energy was transferred from Kyousuke to Hayato.
Kyousuke's position remained almost unchanged while Hayato shot horizontally when he had been falling straight down before.
"Wha-…!?"
He was thrown far from his expected landing point. Instead of the classroom directly below, he was thrown to a long hallway.
A new Artificial Sacred Ground appeared and the remaining Petals were swept over to it.
It must have felt like intentionally jumping into a pitfall only to find there was a second pitfall at the bottom. Hayato frantically corrected the position of his legs, but that slowed him down and worked against his plan.
"…"
Meanwhile, Kyousuke was using his Blood-Sign. He used his White Thorns to accurately target the Petals bouncing freely around the limited miniature world.
His Material was already the Ramming Fish (n h – c b).
Cost: 4. Sound Range: Low. It was a giant fish that swam freely through the dark night and had a single sword-like horn.
Yasuzumi Hayato must have sensed that sticking with the weakest Original Red would be dangerous, so he finally started hitting out his own White Thorns.
"Fuuki-san!!"
The student council president transformed from the red goo into a man-eating flower that crawled around with tentacle-like roots. Unsurprisingly, she smashed the hallway floor.
Their footing vanished once more.
Hayato set his sights on the inside of the outer wall. The new artificial gravity would swing Shiroyama Kyousuke around by 360 degrees. But then Hayato saw something unbelievable.
Before the artificial gravity had even changed, the soles of Kyousuke's shoes were already planted on the wall.
He was running along the wall.
Using the same principle that kept water in a bucket as it is was swung around, it was possible to walk two or three steps on a vertical wall with enough of a starting run and centrifugal force. But that was only if one was prepared to fall back down and possibly break an arm if they messed up the landing.
However, Kyousuke did not need to worry about landing.

After all, the footing had already been destroyed and Hayato was on the move. The enemy assassin could not stop now.
Before Shiroyama Kyousuke's body could be dragged back down by gravity, the new footing was set.
That meant he did not fall.
The battle continued on this new footing.
Meanwhile, even if Hayato had set this up, he still had to use his knees as springs to cancel the momentum of his own weight. He was delayed a bit when compared to Kyousuke who had been attached to the wall before it even became the new footing.
Hayato should have been the one swinging his opponent around, but his own plan was beginning to strangle him.
"You…!?"
"What? You don't have anything else up your sleeve?"
Shiroyama Kyousuke simply smiled as he precisely held up his Blood-Sign.
He seemed to be proving again who the master of this field was.

Part 5

Benikomichi Fuuki felt a strange emotion rising from within her heart.
She had transformed into the Feasting Flower (l v z – j). All Materials were filled with violent and belligerent thoughts, but this was something else.
Yasuzumi Hayato, her partner and summoner, stood on the hallway wall as he fought Shiroyama Kyousuke.
As Fuuki received his support in her man-eating flower form, she clashed with Kyousuke's Material, a giant single-horned fish.
To be blunt, things were not going well.
They had supposedly inputted the optimal values and made the optimal calculations, but they had not received the optimal answer.
Hayato's side had set all of this up, but for some reason Kyousuke's side always seemed to have the upper hand.
It felt like handing their spare ammunition to the enemy and being shot by those very bullets.
However…
<Heh heh.>
The emotion rising from within the transformed girl was joy.
She gave no thought to the fact that her thoughts might be reaching her partner.

<Oh, this is bad. This is really, really bad. My bad habits are coming back… How many years has it been since I wanted to have some fun on a job?>
As Yasuzumi Hayato stood vertically in the hallway, he gave her a quick confused glance.
Yes, she was rejoicing as they were being cornered.
She was delighting in the existence of someone who could push them to the limit like this.
It felt like remembering the distant past.
It was like finding the same atmosphere as when she had joined hands with a veteran assassin and lived a life of constantly being pushed to the limit.
<I keep talking about surpassing him and abandoning him, but all I'm really doing is chasing after Telomere's End's shadow. I still yearn for those days. A memento is no more valuable than a memento. Ahh, is that what it all meant?>
She had taken on the unnecessary risk of side effects to hide that she was a vessel and thus avoid unnecessary battles with other summoners, but there had been no real reason to become student council president. She could have lived the life of an inconspicuous and obedient student.
Had she done so regardless because she had wanted to try walking a path besides that of the dead summoner's teachings?
She had lived up to everyone's expectations, stood before everyone, and aimed for something beyond them all.
But it had not been enough.
No matter how much she succeeded as a human, that summoner's shadow never vanished. The traces of that man had become a part of the girl named Benikomichi Fuuki.
To the point that she was willing to use his "memento" of a son to immerse herself in those memories.
Kyousuke had said there was no saving her.
He must have seen through it all in that quick exchange.
And Yasuzumi Hayato had likely seen it too.
<So what?>
As the man-eating flower's fangs clashed with the giant fish's horn, Benikomichi Fuuki mocked it all.
<Even if he knows the truth, I've taught him to continue favoring me regardless. Oh, I get it now. Finding it boring when everything goes just the way you want is the ultimate form of selfishness.>
The vessel's feelings were not directed toward the summoner.
To her, there was only one person superior to her.
In fact, she felt fonder of the formidable foe who had reminded her of those days.
<Every word coming from Hayato's mouth is my own and every word coming from my mouth is that man's. Hayato knows that, but he still does as I say. Not as a puppet or a clown, but as an assassin who outputs violence according to the requested job. But it's too bad, Hayato. I wasn't

looking for a teacher's pet that develops according to schedule. I was betting on the possibility of you destroying the framework of pre-established harmony.>
Yasuzumi Hayato was considered a failure after scoring a perfect 100, so there was no reward for him here. And Benikomichi Fuuki was an extraordinarily cruel girl for forcing that onto him so readily.
Blood and knowledge.
Genes and techniques.
The assassin summoner boy was trapped between both of those, but he had created a place for himself in the slight gap between and he called out a girl's name from the bottom of his gut. He awaited instructions like a machine.
"Fuuki-sa-…!!"
But the poor boy was cut off. He seemed to realize something that frightened him. His mouth…no, his entire body came to a stop.
The summoner looked to his feet.
He stood on the school's outer wall, so the entire surface was made of glass. There was no need to have the Material break it. If he stomped his foot, he could break it himself. And that transparent footing led to a never-ending expanse. There was nothing horizontal of here. If this broke, he would seriously continue falling for hundreds of meters…no, perhaps even for kilometers.
His life would not be in danger as long as the protective circle lasted, but since he could not predict what high-rise building would become his next footing, that would not improve his situation. Doing that would mean throwing out all his calculations and gambling with his life and future. No plan could be more foolish.
And yet…
<No, Hayato! Don't stop! That isn't what Telomere's End would do! Step onto the ceiling or floor. You can recover from-…>
Benikomichi Fuuki shouted at him as if pushing a doll forward.
The Material ignored the summoner and started on its next attack.
But before it could…
"Librarian-chan."
A voice even colder than the assassin's reached their ears.
The Devouring Wings. Cost: 5. Sound Range: Middle. The monster that reacted to Kyousuke's words was not so much a bird as it was a giant stingray and it had rows of human teeth.
It happened in an instant.
"Do it."
The monster did not hesitate to break the glass earth below their feet.
Fuuki and Hayato were both overcome by the falling sensation that felt like a weight in the stomach. Dumbfounded, they looked to the enemy summoner. Had he made a desperate gamble because he had no chance of

winning? That (from Hayato's perspective) optimistic idea came to mind, but he would soon realize he was wrong.
There was no surprise on Kyousuke's face.
<I knew it… He already knows the battlefield perfectly, even the locations of the buildings a thousand meters from here. This is just like being brought back to that golden age, Shiroyama Boy!!>
This was the territory of the true Telomere's End.
Yasuzumi Hayato was nothing but his memento, so he could never reach this point.
"Oh, ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"
The summoner could no longer speak.
But he did have a direct mental link to the vessel he fought alongside.
<Tch. Prepare to land, Hayato!!>
Benikomichi Fuuki realized what the assassin intended to do, so she collided with Hayato from the side as a burning metal ball of a Material.
That bent his fall by a right angle, so he flew like an artillery shell and stabbed into the outer wall of the gym built next to the school.
He had avoided the thousand meter fall and set the gym's outer wall as their new footing.
Shiroyama Kyousuke followed, as if being dragged over by the wall of the newly created Artificial Sacred Ground. So did the group of red Petals.
Kyousuke landed on the gym wall with the force of a meteor.
No.
With a great roar, the protective circle around him mercilessly broke through the wall.
Hayato and everyone else were thrown horizontally into the dark gym. They landed on the opposite wall and the Petals rained down like a red meteor shower.
As a burning metal ball, Fuuki clicked her tongue at Hayato's wide-eyed look.
<An assassin must remain composed at all times!! Even if this place is destroyed, even if you're sent flying horizontally through the night sky again, even if you have no idea where your next footing will be, and even if you slip between the buildings and fly outside the city altogether, an assassin needs to keep a fearless smile on his face!!>
But Hayato had good reason to be concerned.
The Artificial Sacred Ground only lasted for ten minutes, so he would not be thrown beyond the solar system. But it was obvious what would happen to a flesh-and-blood human if the effects wore off during a horizontal fall.
Fuuki knew that, but she still worked to motivate him.
<Don't stop, Hayato! Remember the rules of the family. This is just like a crack in a dam. If an assassin hesitates, it will all fall apart from there!!>
And Shiroyama Kyousuke did not hesitate.
"Librarian-chan."
"Dammit!!!!!!"

When he heard that, Yasuzumi Hayato ran full speed along the gym wall. He ran toward the floor. At the same time, he instructed Benikomichi Fuuki to drop down from “above” to destroy their footing.
<So you choose survival over killing. But I guess there’s no helping that!!>
The burning metal ball crashed down and achieved the desired destruction.
Hayato had arrived at the right angle connection between wall and floor and he stepped onto the floor the instant the footing crumbled.
He had finally escaped the hopeless threat of being thrown out into empty air, so he breathed a small sigh of relief.
But…
“Now, then.”
<That’s right.>
Kyousuke lightly spun his Blood-Sign around.
His previous method would no longer work, but Alice (with) Rabbit did not look concerned.
“This is a large floor with no walls or ceilings in reach. …You can no longer use that artificial gravity tactic you love so much.”
“…!?”
“And if you can’t use your interference tactics, this comes down to pure skill as a summoner. You are no longer much of a threat. If all we’re doing is hitting our White Thorns, I have the upper hand. Or am I wrong?"
<The more passive measures we took, the less freedom we had. He was riling us up to create this situation from the beginning.>
“Ha…ha ha.”
Yasuzumi Hayato raised his Blood-Sign and looked around the dark gym.
There were large holes on both side walls and the ceiling was too far away.
The polished wooden floor was the only surface. There really was nothing he could do. There was nothing left with which to create his next footing.
However…
<It’s not over yet. Tell him, Hayato.>
“Hah. Have you forgotten, Alice (with) Rabbit?”
“…”
“This isn’t a normal school. It’s a midair float supported by dozens of pillars! And that means!! There’s plenty of free space down below!!”
<That’s right. That’s how an assassin acts!!>
With those words, the burning metal ball that Benikomichi Fuuki had become dropped down from above.
It was a lot like a lightning strike.
The world split. It went beyond the waxed wooden floor breaking. The foundation of the building and the entire artificial surface of the midair float split, broke, scattered, and crumbled.
Below them was a drop of twenty to thirty meters, several large bridges, and the many thick pillars that supported the midair float. The Rainy Screen that projected images onto the falling raindrops was mainly meant to be viewed from indoors, so there were not many people outside, especially on

these bridges with their view of the night sky blocked by the midair float.
There was no sign of anyone on those bridges.
They could use any of those and land on any of them.
They had recovered.
Hayato could continue at his own pace now. He would make a complete comeback. It would all be over when he landed on his next footing.
But what happened next betrayed his expectations.
“Librarian-chan.”

It happened as soon as Shiroyama Kyousuke said that.
The Spear that Pursues Fresh Blood (bih – ei – dp – tq). Cost: 9. Sound Range: Low. A flying spear over five meters long moved in the span of a breath.
With a deafening noise, the Material stabbed through the bridge Hayato was trying to land on. The bridge broke in two and Hayato nearly lost his balance in midair after preparing his legs like springs. And Kyousuke's Material did not stop there. It smashed through bridge after bridge.
With all of his possible footholds gone, Hayato was sucked into the deep darkness beyond.
<Oh, no!! Don't tell me…!!>
"The…ocean!?"
The sound of the splitting water stabbed into Yasuzumi Hayato's ears.
The ocean surface was not recognized as the Artificial Sacred Ground's next footing.
Without the Artificial Sacred Ground, the Petals were not dragged to him and there was nothing around him.
The assassin was simply shocked at first, but then he realized where the next footing would be. If he continued to sink…
<It will be the ocean bottom located who knows how many dozens of meters down below!?>
Fuuki could see the two summoners sinking.
The protective circles kept them safe from all external and internal forms of death during the ceremony, so none of the seawater made it inside those circles.
However, that also meant their arms and legs could not reach the water. That in turn meant they could not swim and thus they could only continue to sink. Also, the protective circle apparently did not function like a float despite the air inside them.
They could reach the water with their long Blood-Signs, but it would be difficult to lift a human's weight to the surface like that.
And on top of that, Shiroyama Kyousuke mercilessly dropped down on Yasuzumi Hayato while they were both contained within protective circles. This did no damage, but Kyousuke's weight could not be ignored.
Both their weights together invited them to the cold and dark ocean depths.
<Hayato…!!>
When Fuuki prepared to help, Kyousuke's Material glared at her.
She had the inferior cost.
Not only would she be held back, but she could easily be defeated.
"Do you…do you have any idea what you've done, Alice (with) Rabbit!?"
"Yes, I believe the ocean here is about thirty meters deep. That won't be a problem while the protective circles are active, but after the ten minute time limit, the water pressure will rush in at us. …Things might be different if you slowly dove down like a normal diver, but even thirty meters is

enough to knock you out from shock if it arrives as suddenly as throwing a switch.”
And if Hayato passed out in the water, it was obvious what fate awaited him.
He would lose the right to struggle and would drown without putting up a fight.
“But…then…the same thing will happen to you!!”
“…”
“Or…do you have a way out? No, there isn’t one. You don’t have an oxygen tank on you. And even if you did, that wouldn’t help with the water pressure squeezing at your blood vessels and organs. Then…!?”
“You tossed me around a lot with that artificial gravity.”
Kyousuke showed no sign of fear as he sunk toward the ocean bottom like he had been thrown off the pier at night with a concrete block in his arms.
“That was probably around 4 or 4.5 Gs. A roller coaster can recreate that, so the protective circle won’t cut it off. But if you combine that with a special way of breathing, you can adjust the oxygen level in your blood without visiting a specialized hyperbaric chamber.”
“……”
“Unlike you, I’ve already prepared for a high pressure environment. …Do I really need to tell you anything more?”
“O-oh, owaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”
Yasuzumi Hayato swung his Blood-Sign like crazy to hit his White Thorns, but his hands came to a stop. But this was not just because he was not used to fighting underwater.
When he destroyed his footing and set up a new Artificial Sacred Ground, the Spots would appear based on that new Artificial Sacred Ground.
That meant the Spots would not appear until that new Artificial Sacred Ground had been set. Nor would the remaining Petals slide this way. In other words, he could not interfere with his Material even with the White Thorns he had.
There was nothing he could do.
Benikomichi Fuuki was still trying to grasp, crush, and kill Kyousuke’s Material. The giant spear was fighting the burning metal ball, but Kyousuke’s had the upper hand in pure cost and in the sound range. Plus, Fuuki never had a chance without him constantly moving from footing to footing to throw off their opponent’s pace.
No help was coming.
He could not float back up to the surface.
The chain of death was attached to Yasuzumi Hayato’s feet and it dragged him down to the watery depths thirty meters below.
Then the new Artificial Sacred Ground appeared and the artificial gravity chained him here.
As if to prove his life was bound here, the petals rained down from above and the new Spots opened wide.

With that, Yasuzumi Hayato's chances of victory were extinguished.
If he lost, his protective circle would vanish, the water pressure would crush him, and he would lose consciousness. Even if he won, how far could he reach in just ninety seconds? At A Block's international airport, he had used the Divine-class Leviathan to drag a submarine high overhead, but that was because he had had room to send the Material below the target.
Plus, the protective circle would repel the summoner (meaning the Material could only contact him for an instant), so the Material could not interfere with the summoner's body for very long. To put it simply, it was very difficult for the Material to grab the summoner in a giant hand, place him on its back, and carry him around. It differed on a case-by-case basis, but the summoner tended to slip away like an eel or wet bar of soap.
In the end, Hayato could not use that method unless he could swim up under his own power to create some space below him. Unlike with the school building, he would need to build up his Material quite a bit to smash ten meters of the hard bedrock, but it was unlikely he could reach that point after focusing so much on interference tactics.
<Hayato.>
But then the assassin's heart leaped in his chest.
The directionless voice that reached his head or chest breathed new life into him.
<Hayato, that isn't a problem. We remain assassins until the world without death is complete. When weighing survival against killing, you must be the sort of person who chooses the latter.>
"…"
Strength returned to his hands as he held the Blood-Sign.
Fuuki could tell even from a distance.
But first…
<So hurry up and build up our Material. For Telomere's End's victory!!>
Something broke.
Did Fuuki really understand what had caused it?
On the ocean bottom far below, Hayato let go of his Blood-Sign and blankly stared upward.
They were only a few dozen seconds away from the time limit.
But that would be enough time for Kyousuke's Material to wear down and kill the burning metal ball Fuuki had become.
She felt fear.
But even greater was the joy of battle that filled the student council president's mind.
Was it the lack of this that kept Hayato from reaching that golden age? Was it the presence of this that kept Fuuki from forgetting that golden age?
Yes, she could not forget it.
<Ahh, ahh. I've lost this one.>
Fuuki smiled at that fact, as a ferocious form charged toward her.
What was the true desire swirling deep inside her heart?

<This proves it! Telomere's End truly was the greatest summoner!! No matter who tries to surpass him and no matter who tries to get rid of him, no one can drag that unique summoner down from his throne!!>
But even if Fuuki had betrayed Hayato, she could not have simply stabbed him in the back.
She had needed to put everything into the planning and execution yet have it foiled by some other summoner. That had been the only way to *establish an official ranking that included Telomere's End.*
That had been the only way to prove his superiority.
<An ally needed to be defeated and an enemy had to defeat him. Honestly, you were the most useful summoner I could have hoped for.>
Her thoughts were only linked to Yasuzumi Hayato, so they would not reach Shiroyama Kyousuke.
But she did not care.
Benikomichi Fuuki shouted her thoughts as the innocently cruel girl who was Telomere's End's vessel.
<So I'm thankful, Alice (with) Rabbit. In a way, you saved me by being such a formidable foe!!>
She had not cared about the memento.
The world without death had not mattered.
There was just one thing that girl had wanted: placing that man's deeds in an eternal hall of fame and protecting that ultimate record to ensure no one could trample on it.
She had simply wanted to prove that Telomere's End's methods had been correct and that any other methods would only bring pain.
Even if it was his relative or son, she could not allow anyone to disturb that sanctuary.
Even if it was meant to challenge him.
<Ha ha.>
She had achieved her goal.
The vessel named Benikomichi Fuuki thought of the summoner she had once stood beside.
She pictured the face of that man who had been too distant to call it love but too close to call it respect.
<Ah ha ha ha

Part 6

Even though Kyousuke had prepared himself for a high pressure environment, there was only so much he could do on the fly. However, he could not float while inside the protective circle. As soon as the battle ended, he discarded the Chain time, returning Librarian-chan to her human form and removing the circle that prevented him from swimming. His vision immediately shook.
He just barely remained conscious.
That was the most his safety measure had bought him.
"…"
He clenched his teeth and grabbed the arm of the assassin floating at the bottom of the ocean. The boy did not put up any kind of resistance. When a summoner or vessel lost, they entered a state of mental shock similar to seeing the god they worshipped slaughtered before their eyes and that state would continue for more than twenty-four hours. They became puppets that did anything they were told, but he would definitely drown if left like this.
Kyousuke swam toward the surface.
Librarian-chan was a slender girl again and she was already swimming up as well. He had instructed her to keep the fight on the upper edge of the Artificial Sacred Ground. More accurately, he had told her to keep the lower position so she could drive Student Council President Benikomichi Fuuki ever higher and keep her at the ceiling of the Artificial Sacred Ground.
Artificial Sacred Grounds were twenty meter cubes by default, so at a depth of thirty meters, the top would be about ten meters deep. That was shallow enough to keep the water pressure from crushing her.
Librarian-chan grabbed Benikomichi Fuuki's arm because the girl was still suffering from the water pressure (and had become a zombie in the original sense of the word after the shock of losing).
Kyousuke swam after them, but a dull pain ran through his head. He felt nauseous, like a magnified version of carsickness.
(Dammit… I have a light case of decompression sickness…)
A rapid change from low to high pressure was a problem, but the opposite was also a problem. The nitrogen in the blood would form bubbles that could cause headaches, nausea, internal bleeding, etc. The symptoms were known as decompression sickness or the bends.
However, he could not stay underwater forever.
He clenched his teeth and forced down the urge to vomit as he stuck his head out from the water.
If he had been about twenty meters deeper, the symptoms would have been more severe and may have killed him.

“Bwah!!”
“Wait, Shiroyama-kun, what is that!? Your eyes are all bloodshot and they’re shedding bloody tears…”
“I’m lucky that’s all it is. More importantly, let’s find somewhere to get out of the water. We can’t float forever with this baggage weighing us down. And it’ll probably get more troublesome once they come to.”
To make sure the dazed summoner and vessel did not drown, Kyousuke and Librarian-chan placed them on their backs and supported them from below as they swam. They felt like otters, but they finally arrived at one of the pillars holding up the high school’s midair float and climbed up using the staircase wrapping around it like ivy.
Librarian-chan looked up while carrying the student council president on her back.
“W-we really messed up our school, didn’t we?”
“Maybe we should be glad you’ve calmed down enough to be worried about that,” spat out Kyousuke.
That summoner and vessel pair had their origins in the summoner known as Telomere’s End.
They had planned to create a world without death.
That had all been stopped now that no one remained to complete the final ignition. The world built on the hatred and acceptance of human death would not be destroyed overnight.
It was all over.
For the time being, anyway.

Part 7

The school building’s roof had collapsed, the gym had been smashed flat, and the midair float supporting them had broken apart and fallen into the sea. The collapse had reached the school building which was shaped like three sides of a square, so around half of the building had been lost.
Most of what remained was the empty schoolyard.
“Phew…”
When they arrived at the partially-collapsed schoolyard, Kyousuke and Librarian-chan set down the assassins who were now dazed dolls. Kyousuke confiscated their Blood-Sign and Incense Grenades before tying their hands behind their backs.
Once they were bound, he pulled out his smartphone.
“Aika, how is the weather map looking?”

“The unnatural currents that ignore the wind direction and pressure changes are beginning to fall apart. At this rate, their ‘circle’ will be gone in a half hour or so.”
“Is there anything else we need to destroy?”
“Government personnel were sent to that factory in the name of an inspection. Based on the documents they found in the rubble, the special materials in the atmosphere will not last long-term without the ignition, so they will break apart on their own.”
In that case, time would solve the rest.
Kyousuke said goodbye and hung up.
And then…
<Yahoo☆ My – dear – brother.>
A harsh look came over his eyes when a girl’s voice cut in.
He looked over and saw a new figure on the crumbling schoolyard. The Queen with silver twintails and a white dress seemed enveloped by pale glowing particles. That peak of the Unexplored-class was known as the strongest of the strong. She smiled as she used the Rainy Screen to appear in the extended rain and used directional speakers to speak.
“Why are you here?”
<Why? To say goodbye since I will soon be leaving for a while.>
The White Queen pointed up toward the night sky from which the rain fell.
<My body is being stored on an abandoned civilian space station, but that too will fail now that the summoner behind the plan was defeated. Once that falls apart, my mind must return to my body.>
“Really?”
<Yes.>
“That’s really the only reason?”
<Brother, are you trying to tempt me into doing something more?>
The world without death had been stopped and the mysterious things caused by the masterminds would be gone by the following day.
But then someone else came to Librarian-chan’s mind.
She could never remember what that person looked like no matter how hard she tried.
They should have been closer to her than anyone.
The rainy image of the Queen briefly blurred.
Rubber rain boots could be heard on the wet ground.
A small girl hid her face behind a broken umbrella and her raincoat was dyed red.
“Onee…-chan?”
The Rainy Girl did not reply to Librarian-chan’s trembling voice.
No, it was just that she did not speak out loud. Her small lips may have been moving below the umbrella, but her posture kept the broken umbrella in the way and Librarian-chan could not follow those movements.
She too would disappear.

A paranormal system had twisted causality and allowed the impossible to appear, but that would collapse with time. Once that happened, the Rainy Girl could no longer appear. The same was true of the White Queen who was supported by the Rainy Screen. Once the rain let up, they would return to their proper places. No one could stop it. Even if they tried to stop it by force, it would create a great distortion just like Yasuzumi Hayato and Benikomichi Fuuki had.
"…"
For a while, Librarian-chan and the Rainy Girl faced each other.
Only Librarian-chan knew what thoughts filled her heart then.
No matter what anyone said, that was her sister. At the same time, no matter what explanation she was given, she could not rid herself of the deep-rooted fear she felt.
Even so, she finally spoke.
"This is…for the best."
She was not just talking about now. Her voice seemed to restart the time that had been stalled ever since a certain tragedy had thrown a certain family into despair.
"I mean, it would be wrong to leave you wandering in the rain forever. It isn't right for everyone to treat you like a strange monster. So we need to end this here. I don't know if there's an afterlife or if we're reborn, but there must be some place you're meant to go. So…"
The Alice (with) Rabbit boy briefly thought of a certain pair of twins.
But there were as many different endings as there were people. Without saying another word, Kyousuke handed Librarian-chan a single Incense Grenade. He then held her small hand in his own. He aimed it toward the target while it was in the vessel's hand.
This was not the kind of distortion that Hayato and Benikomichi Fuuki had created. This would create a true Artificial Sacred Ground. The clog would be removed and the ghost that was unnaturally caught here would be swept away to "somewhere else".
It was a tool to assist a wandering soul.
"…"
Librarian-chan had said this was for the best, but her face crumpled up and she fell silent when she felt the actual weight in her hand. But the summoner had concluded she would regret it later if she just let it happen and had Kyousuke do it for her.
The Rainy Girl said nothing.
The broken umbrella spun around with its bearer in the center. Unlike her thorough silence, the small movement seemed to reveal a slight will. And that will relaxed the tense atmosphere.
This would end it.
More accurately, it would accept that this life had already ended.

The rain let up just a little. A break might open in the clouds and the rain might stop entirely. If that happened, the Rainy Girl would disappear. She might never appear again.
So Librarian-chan decided to place her finger through the pin along with Kyousuke's finger, pull it out, and see it through to the end.
However, something interfered.
"Uuh…"
She heard an odd sound.
No, it may have been a voice.
"Uuh…ohhh…"
The terribly distorted voice seemed to be coming from a broken audio system, so she could not tell what it was saying.
But at the very least, it was not coming from the Rainy Girl. That ghost could not produce her own voice as a sound.
However, it was not Shiroyama Kyousuke, Librarian-chan, or the White Queen either.
Then who was it?
Something happened as soon as they all turned toward the sound.
"Ohhhhh,
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
hhhh!! Notice us alreadyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!!"

There was an explosive sound much like bluish-white sparks scattering.
Static ran through the White Queen's image.
The raindrops that should have all fallen in the same direction had their paths bent in every direction by the noise.
And with that explosion, the producer of the voice appeared as if through a split in space itself.
It was a pair of twin shrine maidens with long blonde and black hair.
Kyousuke spoke in confusion.
"Meinokawa Renge and Higan?"
"Ohh… So we finally made it to this side. I don't know what layer we were on, but when our presence is observed strongly enough by the people of any of those worlds, we're pulled toward them. It's scary how those fields overlap."
"Eek!? W-wait a second. Is that the, um, White Queen smiling over there?"
Librarian-chan could not keep up and her mouth flapped open and closed.
"What are these layers you're talking about? A-and where did you come from?"
"Hm? Who are you? Well, that doesn't matter.
The black-haired shrine maiden, Renge, casually ignored Librarian-chan's questions.
"We were investigating some mysterious disappearances in Toy Dream 35 and – while I'm not sure this is the best way to put it – we fell victim to it ourselves. Well, it was something like that girl with the umbrella over there."
"……What?"
Layers.
Mysterious disappearances.
When their presence was observed strongly enough by the people of any of those worlds, they were pulled toward them.
Nothing Meinokawa Renge mentioned seemed to fit with the assumptions Kyousuke and Librarian-chan were working from. After all, the "girl with the umbrella" she had mentioned was Librarian-chan's ghost who had been killed years before.
But.
What if it was those assumptions that were wrong?
"W-wait! What do you mean mysterious disappearances? That isn't what happened to my sister. If she had just gone missing, there would have been some hope left!! She really was killed, there was no hope at all, and that's why she's appearing to me as a ghost now!!"
"Did she look like a ghost to you because she was suddenly appearing and disappearing? But that's just a normal girl. And she isn't causing this. We don't understand it all ourselves, but we do know something since we 'lost our way' too. …The issue is with the world, not the people. I thought Higan was a ghost at first too."
This was not over.

They did not understand it all.
If the Meinokawa Sisters had appeared out of thin air, there had to be a reason for it. Those living girls had mysteriously disappeared somewhere and had now returned. That much made sense, but the Rainy Girl was different. She had to be different. After all, she had already died several years before.
And yet.
And yet!
And yet!!!!!!
<Hee hee. Ahh, ahh. And I was only a step away from making you mine, brother.>
Only the White Queen was laughing.
And she had more to say.
<So the secret's out. Yes, the Rainy Girl *is actually alive*.>
Shiroyama Kyousuke felt like the blood was boiling in his head.
The current situation and the basic assumptions vanished from his mind and he tried to grab at the illusion in the rain.
"Queen!!!!!"
<Ahn, brother. If you really do want to touch me, then build a brand new system yourself.>
The Queen gave him the look of a playful kitten.
<Besides, using the Summoning Ceremony's definition, a ghost is like a puddle of power that has nowhere to escape due to a clog, right? That soul was lost several years ago, so even if a clog forms in the present, the water is not going to rise back up from the drain. Your logic there didn't even make sense, brother.>
"Then what was this…? No, wait. Don't tell me…!!"
<Yes, if you recalculate it all with the assumption that the Rainy Girl is *alive*, you of all people should be able to find the correct answer, brother.>
"So you knew from the beginning…?"
<Knew what? That you had a chance to change everything, but you were going to throw it all away during the final countdown?>
There was blatant enjoyment in the White Queen's voice.
Kyousuke knew he could not reach her, but he still yelled at her.
"You knew and you kept giving me unneeded hints to distract me!! You knew every moment I spent on stopping that world without death was wasting the time limit of another girl's life! What's going to happen to this girl who is *unnaturally* living here? What happens once time runs out!? Is what I'm thinking accurate!? If it is…!!"
<Oh, come on.>
The Queen placed a hand on her cheek with a smile reminiscent of thick gum syrup.
<As Alice (with) Rabbit, you go on and on about saving the world and protecting mankind, so if you unwittingly abandoned a girl you still could

have saved and threw her back to the murderer…why, that would break you, wouldn't it? And I could use that to make you mine, don't you think?>
"What…are you…?" Librarian-chan spoke up as the rain hit her tearful face. Then her voice rose to a confused shout. "What are you talking about!? I mean, my sister was…I mean, she had to have been killed way back then!! Even now she's covered in blood! What could you call that if not a ghost!? How can all of you say she's alive…!?"
The White Queen giggled at her confusion.
She had maintained her lovely smile even when idolized by Guard of Honor and when used by the heirs of Telomere's End. Her boiling point lay elsewhere. She could accept any impoliteness as long as it did not involve Kyousuke.
All of a sudden, she held some ice cream.
<Please don't get so worked up over the existence or absence of truth. For example, where do you think "this" is?>
"Eh? Eh?"
<Answer me. Hurry.>
The core of her voice was powerful enough to shut down any resistance, but it also had the strength to invite dependence.
Librarian-chan gasped and forced out her voice.
"Where is it…? Aren't you holding-…?"
Before she could finish speaking, the White Queen took a step to the side. The ice cream left her hand and floated in midair. Not only that, it was quite far away. The two images displayed in the rain had simply overlapped and the ice cream image had been displayed much larger in the distance.
<That is the best human senses can do. That was a simple example using distance, but it could just as easily be the past and the future, cause and effect, confirmation and denial, here and there, coincidence and inevitability, or my brother's world and my world. Do you see the value of the two sides now? The simplest thing can cause them to twist, waver, fade, and mix together.>
"What…?"
<Oh, dear. Did anyone else ever prove to you that your understanding was absolute? For example, you might think my brother's world does the summoning and my world is summoned. …But who ever said that? Perhaps it is all of you who are being summoned by something. If someone messes with it just a little, perhaps normally impossible times, places, and situations could appear. Yes, just like a file you threw into the trash can reappear on your desktop if a powerful enough search is used. Or like a file that should be there can vanish for some reason.>
Librarian-chan's mouth flapped wordlessly.
The Meinokawa Sisters did not interrupt either.
But not because they were flabbergasted by what the White Queen had said. They were overwhelmed on a more fundamental level. It was like coming across an alien that spoke Japanese.

<Besides, it's wrong to think a puny human can see the entirety of the world. All of you have scattered, individual intelligences that are satisfied looking at just the surface of the world and searching only through what you understand. Did you really think you could reject the words of someone who has swallowed up and conquered another entire world? What you saw here was *the invisible being displayed* due to some kind of bug or error. The deleted file returned. It's the same as a monster like me crossing worlds to have some fun. Why can't you understand something so simple?>
"…"
<You have only lived for about a decade and a half, so it's laughable to think you can speak about the standards and common understanding of this world. Your words are as valuable as the morning dew on a leaf. I can crush them with a single word of my own. Of course, that changes entirely if you use your time more efficiently like my brother☆>
Librarian-chan looked over to Kyosuuke as if asking for help.
She may have wanted him to say this was all the Queen's insanity.
But Kyousuke could not give her the "common sense" she wanted.
"As the heirs of Telomere's End spread their thin layer of incense across the globe, the laws of this world were gradually distorted. And probably without them even noticing. Can you picture that much?"
"Y-yes. But how does that mean my sister is alive?"
"I'm getting to that," spat out Kyousuke as he agonized over the situation himself. "Say you have a window in front of you. If you color the window red, you would see a red scene when you looked through it. …But just looking at the red window, you can't tell which side of the window was painted. In other words, the concept of 'sides' goes away."
<Yes. And you would think you could tell by touching the window, right? But that's wrong. Are you looking at the window from Viewpoint A or from Viewpoint B? Which side is 'outside' and which side is 'inside'? Which side are you standing on? Which side are you looking at it from? You no longer know.>
"If Toy Dream 35 is the 'red window', then was the entire world being dragged into it?"
<The wide-range universal incense fogged up the window and that single distortion overturned the concept of "sides".>
The White Queen's outline blurred.
Then gray static filled her Rainy Screen image. It looked like a swarm of small bugs was crawling across her. She remained a twintail girl, but one's impression of her could transform into anything like with a Rorschach test.
<Thus there is little value in categories and divisions. There are no "sides". There is no past or future, no close or far, no cause or effect, no confirmation or denial, no here or there, no coincidence or inevitability, and no my brother's world or my world. All of those walls have collapsed from a single trick in this mixed environment. The premises and causality are no

longer necessary. Everything before your eyes can only be called ‘reality’. So of course…>
“If she exists, breaths, walks, and speaks like a person…and she has been defined as something other than a ghost, then the Rainy Girl here is alive. We have to view her as alive…”
Kyousuke tightly clenched his back teeth.
He was ashamed that his own miscalculation had brought him a step away from being won over by the White Queen.
“If we save her here, she will live. If we kill her here, she will die. The rules couldn’t be simpler, right?”
<Yes. And that’s what makes it so interesting.>
“But why the Rainy Girl? If she was called back because she’s missing and was lost, then shouldn’t the age of the dinosaurs show up too?”
<Well, I have heard rumors of people running across old lovers, dead pets, and lost treasures. Most likely, the act of someone observing it is of little importance. It wasn’t because Person A’s wish was granted that their lover appeared. It was because Person B and Person C wanted to know about Person A’s first love. Those trivial wishes of *others* search for answers over an insignificant range and those things have been thinly gathered across at least the Northern Hemisphere. And those lost things reappear like a file being restored from the trash. Don’t you think that explains the current situation?>
“I could calculate it out that far. But that isn’t a reason.”
<What about the fact that this was all put together by the heirs of Telomere’s End?>
The White Queen had become a mass of gray static that almost made Kyousuke feel like he was facing himself and she answered him as if rewarding him.
<By the way, brother, do you know why the original Telomere’s End died? …It was apparently suicide. Just once in his life, he failed to kill someone who deserved death. As a result, an innocent life was lost, so he took responsibility with his own life.>
“…”
<Yes, the person who deserved death was the Rainy Girl’s murderer. Even if Yasuzumi Hayato and Benikomichi Fuuki were not directly involved, they were influenced by Telomere’s End. …It is possible they were entirely unaware of it as they built their plan, but even so…>
“A subconscious bias entered the fine-tuning of their ceremony?” blankly muttered Kyousuke. “And that twisted causality enough that it altered the murder that led to all of this?”
The world without death itself had been an ideology born of a desire to escape an unbearable reality. And what reality would have felt most unbearable to them…no, to the original Telomere’s End? That line of thinking naturally led to the answer.
They had wished to reject a certain girl’s death.

Even if it meant using a giant Artificial Sacred Ground to twist causality and vaguely erase the concept of “sides”.
“And I was about to confirm that death… Ahh, ahh. The Rainy Girl was what Librarian-chan told me about in the very beginning! But I got distracted and rushed into the unrelated matters of Killer Intent Antenna, Telomere’s End, and the world without death!! And all the while, the Rainy Girl’s time was running out!!”
<Oh, but there is no reason to let that get to you. I was the one that laid out the trail of breadcrumbs leading you in that direction. …If I hadn’t, you would have easily saved the Rainy Girl as a quick detour and then gotten back on track. And that would have been far too boring.>
“W-wait.”
Librarian-chan spoke up with a tremor in her voice.
She was trying to reject that the Rainy Girl, her sister, was alive, but not because she did not want to accept it.
She suspected that some great malice was hidden behind it all. She suspected that something would ruin it all.
“My sister is all bloody and broken! If she’s still alive, she wouldn’t look like that!”
The Queen gave a malicious smile as a bloody-smelling “illusion” oozed from the gray static.
<That has nothing whatsoever to do with anything. Besides, she only looks like that because you are viewing her through a mental filter. The Meinokawa Sisters had no prior knowledge of the situation, so how do you think she looked to them?>
The twin sisters were afraid of the sandstorm-like White Queen, but they also seemed confused by the topic at hand.
Yes, they had simply called the Rainy Girl a “girl”. Whether she was a ghost or not, that was not how someone would describe a girl who had been stabbed in the head nineteen times by a grass sickle. She had to look different to the Meinokawa Sisters than she did to Kyousuke and Librarian-chan.
And if she looked different…
If she was really just a normal little girl…
“What’s…going to happen…?”
Librarian-chan hesitantly spoke up.
She could tell from the ominous conversation that this would be more than just a reunion.
It would mean abandoning the Rainy Girl and throwing her back to the murderer. Those words stabbed into Librarian-chan’s chest.
“What’s going to happen to my sister!?”
<My – dear – brother.>
“The Rainy Girl was a murder victim, but in this place where everything is mixed together, why would we ‘only’ meet the victim?”
“You…don’t mean…”

<Yes. “He” is coming.>
The White Queen cheerfully answered.
<Just like the Rainy Girl, someone else irresponsibility searched for him out of curiosity. As if to say this ending is inevitable, that man with the grass sickle will appear before her.>
“You’re kidding, right? …Right!? My sister is still standing! She’s here and she’s alive in some form! We might be able to change something, but you’re saying we can’t do anything as she’s killed again!? Th-that’s…that’s too much. No, wait. It’ll be all right. We defeated a paranormal-controlling summoner and an assassin! A normal murderer doesn’t stand a chance against us, right!? Tell me I’m right!!”
“…Queen.”
<Yes. The calculations are already complete. I believe it will happen in a few dozen more seconds. Now, brother, can you make it in time?>
The White Queen said “and” as she snapped her fingers in her rain-projected image.
The mass of static instantly vanished and only the beautiful Queen remained in perfect clarity.
<What is she really? Has she arrived from the past, has she been reborn, or is this a detailed emulation? None of that matters. The special conditions that created the red-painted window will vanish along with the deathless world. But before that can happen, the invited element will be destroyed by a different element. A certain girl’s death will be confirmed and everything gathered here will scatter to its original locations. It is no different than counting to ten to create a new timeline inside a world of frozen time, and it is just like how a warp meant to cross great distances can be expressed as having tunnel-like depth. The Northern Hemisphere is both the Rainy Girl’s afterlife and the living world that confirms her death. …In – other – words, this is the final crossroads, brother.>

“…”
<You have two options.>
In the image, the White Queen, raised her arms like a set of scales and turned her palms toward the rainy sky.
<First, do what is right and overlook the murderer. Distorting the laws of the world and altering that definite ending would be wrong and what is wrong is bad, so abandoning this girl to her proper death would be an act of good.>
The monster among monsters giggled as she whispered to him.
<Second, do what is kind and defeat the murderer. Twisting the world is fine by you and you don’t care if that destroys everything people have built up in the proper way. To save the one person before you, you will twist the causality of seven billion people. That means saying you don’t care what happens to everyone else as long as you can save that one.>
He had the worst possible solution in his hands.
If the White Queen and the Meinokawa Sisters were telling the truth, then this was indeed a crossroads. When the Rainy Girl had been killed, her death had influenced the original world. In the same way, intercepting the murderer and preventing him from killing her might change something.
He was not just viewing a news story from the past.
Nothing was certain in this world and he stood here as an active participant.
But should he really change that?
But was it right to not change it?
“Help her.”
Librarian-chan’s voice shook.
She had been prepared to say goodbye, but that was only when there was no other option. Now that she knew her sister was about to be killed and would become a ghost again, could she really abandon her? Could she watch the tragic scene of the girl being stabbed nineteen times in the head?
The answer was obvious.
And so she raised her voice.
“If there’s a way to save her and a way that she might not have to die, then I want to try it! Shiroyama-kun, tell me what to do!! Tell me how to save my sister!!”
But…
However…
The broken umbrella spun around.
The tattered edge of the fabric failed to cover the bottom of the girl’s face, giving a view of the small lips.
No voice left them.
Even so, what they said was clear.
“I don’t need help.”
“…!? Why not!?”

Librarian-chan tearfully shouted back, but the Rainy Girl mouthed more words.
It was a definitive rejection.
“I don’t want to destroy your world.”
This was no longer a spooky ghost.
It was nothing more than a girl who had pursued this incident from beginning to end and seen her sister’s part in it all.
The long rain looked like it would let up at any moment.
The Rainy Girl’s body faded.
If she vanished now, they would lose their one and only opportunity.
Even if they grabbed her hand and tried to shelter her, she herself would vanish, so there was nothing they could do. And could Kyousuke, Librarian-chan, and the others really find her if they ran around the city? Wouldn’t the murderer find her faster since he would appear for the sole purpose of killing her?
In other words, her fate was sealed.

Part 8

It felt like waking from a long, long dream.
When she came to, the girl was alone. Her little sister who had grown bigger than her was gone, the boy and the two girls were gone, and the very, very scary white girl was gone.
She was still in Toy Dream 35.
At first, she thought she had returned to the past…no, to her original world, but she soon realized that was not the case. The city around her looked a lot like it, but the paint and signs were completely different. And when the girl had been killed, the city’s grand opening had been approaching and the power had been off. She had snuck in, thinking it was like a secret base, but then she had run into that monster. It was because the city had been like a brand-new model house that no one had come to save her no matter how much she screamed.
This was still the distorted world, her sister’s world.
But the location itself was the scene of her murder. Because people around the world had taken a mild interest in the ghost known as the Rainy Girl… no, in the depressing crime from the past, the incident had been “searched for”. And that had summoned her here. And the most appropriate place was the spot at which she had been killed.

Furthermore, if the people had subconsciously, involuntarily, and irresponsibly searched for and brought her back like restoring a deleted virus, what if that applied to the murderer as well as the victim?
Just as the Rainy Girl had been summoned here, that murderer would also arrive here.
“…”
The end was nigh. The deathless world at the foundation had crumbled away and this mysterious space was supported by the bugs and errors that world had created as side effects, so this too would be broken. Yet oddly enough, the girl’s outline was clearer than ever before. It was like a cruel joke. It was like she was being displayed more fully now so she could experience the pain, fear, and destruction of her murder all the more vividly. The world returned her sense of pain so it could torture her and it returned her throat so it could hear her scream. That was the extent of the malice she felt here.
Still holding her umbrella and with raindrops still falling on her raincoat and rain boots, the girl simply looked up.
That strange person stood there without wearing any kind of rain gear. Even after taking into account her child’s point of view, he was clearly abnormally huge. His muscles bulged out with complete disregard for his skeletal structure, so he had likely undergone the genetic tuning that had been all over the news for a while. Injecting banned drugs from outside the body was against the rules, but if they were produced inside the body, nothing could be done. At the very least, it was not banned under the existing rulebook. This was the result of undergoing the one-way ticket of organ surgery for that reason. In the end, that simple loophole had been filled by an updated rulebook and those people and their superhuman strength had been driven from the world of sports.
A grass sickle blade glistened wetly. The weapon looked out of place in his baseball glove-sized hand. He may have wanted to seem like a civilized human being by using a weapon. Or perhaps he had decided beating her to death with his fists would be like leaving behind a calling card.
The words he muttered below his breath did not reach the girl’s ears. More than the quiet volume, the intonation was bizarre and made it sound like a strange incantation.
The girl more or less knew what would happen next.
She remembered how her grown little sister had seen her and described her in that “living dream”.
I’m going to die here.
I’m going to die without returning to the world I came from.
Only the fact of her death would return to that world.
That could not be changed now. And that was not a bad thing. No matter how it happened, it would be odd for her to survive here. What was odd was wrong and what was wrong was bad. It was right for her to be murdered here. What was right was just and what was just came from a good heart.

Thus, goodness had abandoned the girl.
Thus, justice had left her to her death.
“Yes,” she muttered.
The man shouted something and shoved the girl.
She collapsed backwards and he leaned over her while raising the grass sickle. She could tell from his eyes that he was taking aim at her face or head.
She would die here.
That weapon would be swung down nineteen times and she would be so thoroughly killed that she would no longer have a real face or head.
She knew that, but some words spilled from her mouth as a dark look filled her eyes.
“This was…for the best.”
For a brief time, she had seen her sister all grown up in that intersecting world.
With a smile on her face, her sister had lived in a fairy tale of a place and had found people she could rely on.
The girl could not destroy that.
So she chose what was right and spoke those words to herself while staring up at the deadly weapon.
However…
A great noise interrupted.
It was a tightly clenched fist.
As the man leaned over her and prepared to swing down the grass sickle, the fist dug into his cheek with enough force to break the bone. The blow had someone’s full body weight behind it and it knocked the man off of the girl. He then rolled along the wet ground.
The girl recognized the newcomer.
A boy had thrown the fist. He was the one who had stood beside her mature, grown little sister.
It was Shiroyama Kyousuke.
But he should not have been “here”.
“…Why…?”
As the girl forced out a scratchy voice, Kyousuke crouched down and reached into her raincoat pocket.
He pulled out a smartphone.
“I’d appreciate it if you wait until later to bring up the privacy issues. As soon as I noticed the White Queen’s malice, I switched the GPS on and snuck it into your pocket. After all, I had no way of knowing when or where you would disappear and reappear. I wanted to increase the odds of finding you as much as possible. I was worried the disappearance and reappearance would mess with the electronics, so I’m glad I could pick up its location.”
“No, not that! I’m supposed to be-…I have to be killed here…!!”

At that point, Kyousuke ended their conversation and turned his back on the girl.
He used his body as a shield.
He of course did so because the man he had punched away was squirming. He would get up again at this rate. The entire world seemed to be saying it was right for the girl to die and no amount of opposition would change that. That meant Kyousuke's actions here were wrong.
Or they should have been.
While keeping the girl protectively behind him, the boy spoke without looking back.
"Why do you think I'm doing this? The calculations to reach the relevant answer shouldn't be that complex."
"But!!" The girl shouted a rejection of what was happening to her. "But I can't survive here! Pulling away the foundation just for me is wrong! It's right to let me die here and we have to do what's right! There's no room for me in this world!! None at all!!"
"Everyone changes the world. It's just that most people don't realize they're doing it."
"But!! Not everyone can bring the dead back to life! Everyone calls that cheating!!"
"If so, have you ever thought about *why* people think it's wrong?" Kyousuke spoke with his back to her. "You're using an irregular method to save someone whose death has already been determined. That seems wrong because the effects of the change will spread throughout the world and change everything, which will reject everyone else's honest efforts. It would erase everyone else's bright happiness and smiles for your own convenience."
"Then…!!"
The girl shouted until her throat was dry.
She had seen her grown little sister in that world where everything intersected. Her sister had been smiling and a happy world had surrounded her. The girl had felt lonely when she found no place for her in that world and it had saddened her that everyone feared her when all she did was stand there, but even that small girl knew she must not destroy that.
"Then why are you destroying your own world!?"
"I'm not necessary destroying it," he immediately answered. "Just think about it like this: What if altering it won't take away anyone's happiness, won't rob anyone of their smile, and will actually benefit everyone? …What crime is there in that? And if it isn't a crime and it won't produce any evil, then there's no reason not to save the dying person. There's nothing wrong with saving you here."
"…"
"This is our last chance."
Alice (with) Rabbit seemed to thrust his words before the girl.

He faced the murderer who was trying to “reboot” his mind, but he was clearly speaking to the girl.
“In that distant world you saw, Librarian-chan was smiling, wasn’t she? She was happy enough and satisfied enough with her life, wasn’t she? But what if? Don’t you think adding you into the mix would create an even more wonderful world that removed the ‘enough’?”
“But…but…”
“Besides,” spat out Kyousuke. “What even is the ‘proper world’.”
“That’s the world where I’m killed!! All of it was built on top of that!!”
“Was it really?”
Kyousuke calmly replied to the girl’s cries of true desperation.
“Does the White Queen’s evil really stop there? She was intentionally lying. In order to break me.”
“Eh…?”
“Before being pulled back to her world, the Rainy Girl will be killed by the murderer in this chaotic world. Thus, her death will remain unchanged and everything will revert to normal despite any irregularities. That’s what she led me to believe, but it’s completely wrong. The place and the murderer might be the same, but you weren’t supposed to arrive in this chaotic city. If you’re killed ‘here’, then that murder technically won’t happen. That means whether I save you or abandon you, the world will still be changed.”
“B-but…no, but…!”
In other words, her death would be meaningless.
Weighing her life against seven billion other lives was a complete falsehood and that one lie would take away an irreplaceable life. It was the ultimate evil.
“The White Queen knew that, but she still tried to have me choose it. *She wanted to see me ‘do the right thing’ by abandoning a girl I could have saved only to discover the world changed regardless*. She wanted to crush me with the fact that I had chosen to let you die when I could have saved you even if it was ‘the wrong thing to do’! And by so thoroughly defiling the name of Alice (with) Rabbit, she would have broken me and obtained a convenient dress-up doll to play with!! Are you going to say doing what she says and dying would really protect the ‘proper world’!?”
The girl was dumbfounded.
What did this mean? The girl herself had been prepared to offer up her life to protect her grown little sister, but had that resolve been trampled underfoot by that pure white smile?
The girl’s small body trembled at that bottomless malice.
However, it was not over yet. This would not end in despair.
Not as along as that boy possessed the will to fight the Queen’s evil.
“So let me say it again. It doesn’t matter how trivial a difference it is. Now that the murderer and victim have met in a situation where they shouldn’t have met, the world will change. It has to change…no, we have to change it. And if the risk is the same, it all comes down to our decision. If it can only

change for the better or for the worse, we have to change it for the better. What do you want? Do you want a world with a few more smiles around a girl whose life was spared, or do you want a world where that girl's death was assumed and a family falls into darkness as planned. *Which do you want to be 'the right thing to do'*?"
She had thought the world's justice had rejected her.
She had given up, assuming the world's goodness had abandoned her.
But…
"Really?"
The girl hesitantly spoke up.
"I don't just have to wait for what's right? I can really stand on the side I've chosen?"
"How about I rephrase this to make it a little more unfair? If the circumstances of the murder are changed just a little, the investigation back in your world might change. And if he escapes, he might kill even more people after you. …So this isn't about doing something or doing nothing. Just letting this play out has its own risks."
"…"
"A time bomb is about to explode and we're the only ones nearby. The police and the military won't make it in time. In that case, I think we have the right to make the ultimate decision. Do we sit there and wait for it to explode, or do we try to disarm it despite the danger? I say we risk our lives, tremble in fear, and choose one of the colorful cables to cut. Choosing the best option available seems like 'the right thing to do' to me."
"……"
" 'Save my sister's world.' …Who said that? If there's going to be risk either way, it can't be wrong to work toward reducing that risk as much as possible, toward reducing the tragedy as much as possible, and toward increasing the number of smiles as much as possible. Is what I'm saying really that strange?"
The girl looked back and forth between Shiroyama Kyousuke's back and the man squirming on the ground.
For a while, she was unable to speak.
She reflected on Kyousuke's words and faced what she had seen.
There had been no place for her in that scene.
However, that did not mean she had not been needed.
Her little sister had pursued the secret of the Rainy Girl and had grown angry when someone was trying to toy with that existence. When she had learned that the Rainy Girl would be killed by the murderer whether she remained here or returned to her original world, she had clung to the summoner boy and tearfully begged him to save her.
Having no place there after so much time had passed was not the same as being rejected from the very beginning.
They had wanted to accept her if it had been possible.
But that gruesome murder had torn it all apart.

If that was all…
If it was just some gear out of place…
If she could have been there too…
(I want to…stand.)
Something changed in the girl’s chest.
The gears that had been jammed for so very long were slowly beginning to turn once more.
(I want to stand there…and smile with my sister again…)
So she looked up.
She faced that utterly depressing “reality”.
There was no such thing as a “proper” world. The weight bearing down on her had been a false illusion. The only thing standing in her way was the creepy murderer. Not even offering up her life would fix this and it would only fulfill a few people’s dark desires.
The invisible path forward was not something someone else prepared for you.
It was something you made and walked down yourself.
In that case…
If Shiroyama Kyousuke’s answer was correct…
If she could choose that…
“Then no. I don’t want to die.”
She finally said it, as if peeling the pure feelings from her stubborn soul.
“I want to go to festivals, I want to get first place at the athletic festival, I want to have fun at an amusement park, and I want to go around Toy Dream 35 with my sister once it’s finished! I want to go to middle school, I want to go to high school, and I want to grow up! I want to fall in love, I want to learn all sorts of things at school, and I want to show my sister how amazing her big sister is!! I want to be proud of myself! I want to face forward!! I want to see the future!! I want to walk my own path and become something someone can look up to!!”

What the girl really thought was released into the world.
She gathered all her strength and shouted to the summoner who could overturn it all.
“So…hic, so please! H-help…help meeee

In that instant, Shiroyama Kyousuke determined the location of his opponent's center of gravity from his build, determined the range of motion of the man's arms and legs, and accurately calculated out where he could strike to knock him out in a single blow. At the same time, he was thinking about something entirely unrelated to his victory.
(I need to at least take out his knee so the girl can definitely escape. I need to make sure he can never get back up. I can only interfere while they're in this place that was summoned based on people's "searches". Once it's all over, she has to step back into the world where she belongs. If she can't reach safety on her own, this will all be meaningless.)
He coolly analyzed the situation and stood up while just barely remaining within the limitations of Alice (with) Rabbit.
(It's true some people might think this is wrong. They might laugh and call it a farce soaked in opportunism. Even if I cheat like this, it might not be enough to shake all of mankind and it might only slightly expand the circle of smiles surrounding a single family.)
The grass sickle approached from overhead.
(But.)
Kyousuke swung his body to the side to dodge the deadly blade and stared calmly at the man who tried to tackle him.
(Some might say this is absolutely wrong and some might say it's a grand farce.)
He gathered strength in all his body's muscles as if drawing a bowstring and he took aim with the tip of his Blood-Sign.
He targeted the man's right leg. His kneecap. He stared at it with almost ruthless accuracy so he could smash it with a single strike.
Time seemed to stop.
And in that moment, Shiroyama Kyousuke shouted from the bottom of his gut, as if releasing all his pent up anger.
"But!! This has to be what everyone really wanted to do!!"
He released the Blood-Sign like a bullet.
A tremendous roar burst out.
The knee shattered. This time, the man collapsed with a scream and writhed in pain. He was now no longer a monster or a murderer and the tip of the Blood-Sign jabbed into his gut. It was like the final sword strike to finish off the writhing dragon after a fatal blow from a spear. The man was truly knocked out.
The world would now change.
Kyousuke could never accept the idea that the girl's gruesome murder was "right".
Not as long as he possessed these perfectly normal feelings.

Facts

- The Artificial Sacred Ground's reference surface cannot be the water's surface.
- When the reference surface is destroyed, the Spots will not reappear until the new Artificial Sacred Ground has been set up.
- The Material cannot interfere much with either summoner due to the protective circle. It differs from case to case, but if a giant hand tries grab them, they will usually automatically slip away as if grabbing an eel or a wet bar of soap.
- The Rainy Girl was not a ghost. She was a girl with the possibility to survive.
- As a side effect of the world without death, the global Artificial Sacred Ground twisted even causality and created a world with no concept of "sides" because "you cannot tell which side of a red-painted window is painted just by looking through it and the observer cannot tell if they are on the inside or outside".
- The one and only target that the previous Telomere's End failed to kill was the Rainy Girl's murderer.
- Whether Yasuzumi Hayato and Benikomichi Fuuki were aware of it or not, they were influenced by Telomere's End and fine-tuned their plan in accordance with his wishes. That meant to reject the Rainy Girl's death.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke saved the Rainy Girl himself. No matter what he did or did not do, the world would have been distorted, so he prayed it would accept this as a new form of "right".

Ending X-01: After the Nice Ending

「それじゃあお姉ちゃん、またお昼にね」

「まったく、あなたは私のお弁当が欲しいだけでしょう」

(Ending X-01 Open 05/01 08:20)

エンディングX-01

奇麗に終わったその後に

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Okay, Onee-chan. See you at lunch.”
“Honestly, you’re just after my food, aren’t you?”
(Ending X-01 Open 05/01 08:20)
After the Nice Ending

The rain had finally let up and it was sunny.
Due to the day of the week, they had to go to school like normal on May 1.
Shiroyama Kyousuke held his thin school bag as he walked along the giant bridge to school. He spotted a familiar face on the way.
It was Rendou Akiya who always wore a girl’s uniform for some reason.
Summoners were forgotten when they were not in someone’s field of vision, so Kyousuke had to call out to his friend to gather his attention.
“Good morning, Akiya-san”
“Oh, hey. Morning. …Why so polite?”
“I’m starting to suspect I have low blood pressure and it’s dragging my mood down pretty low too.”
“If you can joke around like that this early in the morning, you’re doing fine. So don’t worry.”
Rendou sounded bored.
“But this incomplete Golden Week is a real pain in the ass. If only they’d give us tickets for our days off like paid leave for office workers. That’d be better than just – boom! – summer break and then – bam! – winter break.”
“If that happened, won’t we end up in hell when a heat wave rolls in?”
“…Maybe so.”
The fact that he complained but showed no sign of actually skipping school may have been a virtue of his.
“By the way, have you heard the latest ghost rumors?”
“What good are those? Unlike soy bean and soy milk trivia, I don’t think ghost stories would be very useful.”
“Now, now. The ghost stories are for scaring the girls so you can escort them down the dark streets at night! You’ll never reach the starting point of romance unless you take advantage of their weaknesses!! And they’ve set up that Rainy Screen event and everything!”
“Rendou, if bringing someone their lost wallet was enough for them to fall in love with you, no one would ever have trouble with love. In fact, it would probably begin a trend of pickpocketing to meet girls.”
“You moron, I said it was the starting point! If you just sit there satisfied with that, you’ll never get anywhere!!”
Rendou Akiya had far too much energy for the early morning, so Kyousuke started to suspect the boy had high blood pressure.
“So what’s this ghost? I seriously doubt it, but it isn’t the Rainy Girl, is it?”
“Hm? What’s that?”
Rendou Akiya gave his confused comment just as the school came into view.
Yes, they could see it.

During the fight with Yasuzumi Hayato and Benikomichi Fuuki, the school building and gym had been destroyed and about half the square midair float had crumbled away, but there was no sign of any of that damage.
It was the usual high school.
It was untouched, as if that battle had never happened.
Meanwhile, the classmate who chose to wear a girl's uniform spoke.
"On rainy days, they say you can see the ghost of a guy who saved a girl from an attempted murderer. It's a happy ending full of justice, so I bet it's the ghost of some legendary martial artist or martyred policeman."
Shiroyama Kyousuke smiled just a little.
That was the story now.
Perhaps no one remembered that battle any longer.
Perhaps there no records of it remained.
But…
"Okay, Onee-chan. See you at lunch."
"Honestly, you're just after my food, aren't you?"
He heard those voices.
A single braid swayed within the crowd of students.
Two girls were smiling together there.
"What is it, Shiroyama-chan?" asked Rendou in a curious tone.
"It's nothing."
Shiroyama Kyousuke said nothing more and looked away from those two.
This was a kind end to a series of events.
Alice (with) Rabbit walked a different path than the girls who no longer needed saving.

Facts

- The girl lived. She chose that path.
- The rumors of the Rainy Girl vanished and rumors of a male ghost who saved a girl spread in their place. Most likely, some of the data from that final clash lingered on.
- Because the incident related to the deathless world vanished, the world of the "red window" and "searches" that the White Queen mentioned also vanished. Kyousuke and Librarian-chan never bound a contract together, the school was never destroyed, Benikomichi Fuuki never planned to create a world without death, Yasuzumi Hayato never received any special education,

Telomere’s End never committed suicide, and the Rainy Girl did not die.

- Librarian-chan has no memories of what happened. Shiroyama Kyousuke, the summoner who put his life on the line to fight, is now just a classmate who she forgets about like normal.
- But by adding just one more girl to that scene, there must be more smiles there than before.

Ending X-02: Nevertheless, We Cannot Reconcile Our Differences

「次はないぞ、女王」

「ええ、次こそは愛してみせますわ、あにうえ」

(Ending X-02 Open 05/01 16:30)

エンディングX-02

それでも和解はできない

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“This won’t happen again, Queen.”
“Yes. Next time, I will make you love me, brother.”
(Ending X-02 Open 05/01 16:30)
Nevertheless, We Cannot Reconcile Our Differences

School let out for the day.
The fun part of the incomplete Golden Week – that is, the long weekend – started tomorrow, so most of the students were rushing joyfully out of the school.
Shiroyama Kyousuke, however, had a grim look on his face.
A sun shower poured from the beautiful evening sky. Glittering orange light was reflected throughout the scene outside the window, but the one boy remaining in the classroom was facing a certain individual.
It was the White Queen.
The summoner wore a school uniform and the monster was displayed on the Rainy Screen.
They faced each other through the red window, one on the classroom floor and the other in midair outside.
<Oh, dear. Oh, dear. You go unrewarded yet again, brother.>
She giggled as she spoke using the directional speakers.
<The heirs of Telomere’s End were defeated, the deathless world was rejected, human civilization was saved, and you rescued a girl’s life while you were at it. You managed to fit 101 people on a lifeboat that should have only been able to hold 100, yet no one thanks you. Isn’t it about time you gave up on the human world?>
The change to the Rainy Girl had entirely erased the deathless world incident that had followed from the previous Telomere’s End’s suicide, but the White Queen seemed to retain her memories of it.
Was that due to being an otherworldly Material or was it something only the White Queen could do?
Kyousuke sighed.
“…Why are you here?”
<To comfort my brother as he gives himself over to sentimentality. But it looks like you might actually enjoy this sentimental mood, so am I intruding?>
“No ending could have been better. I can’t think of anything that was lost here. At the very least, I avoided falling for your trick and abandoning that girl.”
<My, my. I would expect nothing less from my brother.>
The floating White Queen truly seemed to be enjoying herself.
<When you weigh what is “right” against what is “kind”, you will mercilessly choose “kind” every time. In the extreme, you have proven you are willing to destroy the social system that supports seven billion people if it will let you save the one person before your eyes. And the very last hurdle was the idea that the distortion would occur even if the Rainy Girl was killed

now…but you had no real proof of that, did you? You acted solely on your belief that that's what I would do. No, it goes beyond that. You would have saved that girl even if there was no malice behind my actions, wouldn't you have?>
"…"
<Yes, this is it! Yes! This is the answer I wanted most of all!! You scored a perfect 100, brother!!>
"What do you want to know?"
<You have to ask?>
The White Queen smiled as she leaned in closer.
She bent over to peer up at the boy through the window.
<If it is necessary to save the person before your eyes, you will use the "worst method". Instead of one-sidedly accepting what is "right" and rejecting what is "wrong", you keep more of an open mind.>
"Which is different from your close-minded acceptance of only what's 'pure'."
<But I look "impure" to you, don't I?>
He knew what she was trying to say, so he looked her in the eye and spoke.
"That is your delusion."
<Is it, though? You never could have saved that Rainy Girl without the system built around me.>
She giggled and continued in a sweet voice.
<In other words, what if we continued doing the same thing? Didn't I tell you before that we could solve half the world's problems if we worked together?>
"…"
<We compromised and used a system built by someone else this time, but that's just too much work. If you made a system with your superb technique and skill, don't you think we could erase far more tragedies far more efficiently?>
The White Queen displayed on the Rainy Screen held her slender hand out toward Kyousuke.
<Now, brother. Let me ask the same question you did when saving that girl.>
She seemed to be asking him for a handshake.
<What if this was the last chance? What if your decision here would decide how I can be used and what if there were tragedies that could be stopped or not stopped depending on your choice? Now, brother, will you choose the right but cruel option or the kind but wrong option? What will you choose in this world that will be distorted in some way or another from the moment I appear inside it?>
"I see…"
Kyousuke looked down at his palm.
But he did not take the White Queen's hand. He would never reach for the hand of that girl who floated outside the window.

After all…
“Is that how you kindly tempted Yasuzumi Hayato and Benikomichi Fuuki?”
Silence followed.
His words seemed to freeze the entire area.
The White Queen continued smiling.
And then…
<Fwa ha.>
Her laugh was full of scorn.
And of satisfaction.
<Fwa ha ha. Fwa ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!! Yes! Yes, that is my brother! Even after all that, you can’t be shaken! Yes! Oh, yes! You truly are lovely!!>
“Aren’t you just imagining that?”
<No, no, no, no, no! That is not a choice just anyone can make. It’s the same with lasers, and nitroglycerin, and rockets! People tend to be very tolerant of technologies they know are useful!!>
“…”
<You can save so many more if you use me. You can erase tragedies after the fact if you join forces with me. …*So give up on that grueling fight.* They use that excuse and find themselves weakly sucking up to me before they know it. But – oh, honestly – but you, brother!! You look so thoughtful, but you’re really overflowing with a childish idea of justice! How can I not find that adorable!!!???>
“You failed. Can you really laugh after that?”
<Of course!! After all, this loss was nothing more than a ceremony to reconfirm that my beloved brother has what it takes to love me. Yes, yes. I believe this phrase applies: I lost the battle, but I am winning the war.>
At that point, the White Queen asked a question instead.
<But brother.>
It was not a warning filled with sharp thorns.
She sounded like she was rolling around the most enjoyable experience on her tongue.
<It is true this ended with happiness for everyone. The Rainy Girl was not killed, the culprit did not become a murderer, and Telomere’s End did not commit suicide after failing to kill him. Yes, yes. And his ideology that killing people will guide history in the right direction fell apart after he missed a target and everything turned out okay. In other words, that assassin group stopped slaughtering people. It was the perfect happy ending.>
“And?”
<But what if the opposite happened? What if your choice influenced the fate of the world, but the butterfly effect twisted the entire world in the negative direction?>
“That’s easy.”
Kyousuke did not hesitate to answer.

“I would do whatever it took to take responsibility for every last thing my decision had changed.”
If the White Queen was a monster, then so was the boy who faced her.
At the very least, he showed some hints of that.
After all…
<Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!! Yes! Now that is my brother!! Not only do you say you would singlehandedly take responsibility for screwing up the world, you have the techniques and skill to possibly pull it off!! Just how much of a monster are you, brother!?>
Kyousuke narrowed his eyes.
The boy’s techniques and the Queen’s power.
If they worked together, who could say how much they could accomplish?
But he did not want to see where that led.
“We will never understand each other.”
<And that is why I love you.>
“I can’t join you.”
<Doesn’t that just make it all the more exciting?>
The White Queen’s outline blurred.
The deathless world plan had never even been started in this altered world, so the White Queen’s body would never have been summoned and sealed inside the abandoned civilian space station.
Then what was this here?
He had no way of proving it, but Kyousuke suspected she was using brute force to reject the changes he had made.
But even that must have reached its limit.
She would vanish soon. She would return to the other world. And she would eventually reappear somewhere in this world.
Shiroyama Kyousuke did not feel sentimental about the White Queen vanishing.
He instead threw his words at her.
“This won’t happen again, Queen.”
<Yes. Next time, I will make you love me, brother.>
And thus, the two of them parted ways.
Even after saving the world and even after rescuing a girl from unavoidable tragedy, they would still never work together.

Facts

- The White Queen used brute force to hold back the incident’s changes and thus maintained her memories. This suggests that even rearranging causality would fail to affect her being, anything she caused directly, or anyone she killed.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke rejected the suggestion (or temptation) to work together for peace.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke will not hesitate to do whatever it takes to recover from his own mistakes. Even if that means violating the greatest of taboos.
- Despite Shiroyama Kyousuke’s great skill and determination, the White Queen continues to smile. That is just how overwhelmingly powerful she is.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke and the White Queen turned their backs on each other. They will clash again soon.

Afterword

「……」

「……」

(Postscript Open ??/?? ??:??)

あとがき

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“……”
“……”

Afterword
(Postscript Open ??/?? ??:??)

And here is Volume 2.
This is Kamachi Kazuma.
The conflict of Volume 1 was centered on formless things such as faith and loyalty, so I made this volume much simpler by basing the conflict directly on people’s lives.
And in Volume 1, the main enemy was Azalea who (supposedly) belonged to Government, so Illegal was a little overlooked. That is why I focused more on them here. That meant there was no Repliglass in this one, but I think that difference in technology helps show the distinction between the three main powers. And the criminal families’ bonds of blood were different again from Azalea’s noble blood. I am praying that dividing things up between Government and Illegal like that was effective.
So does that mean the next enemy will be from Freedom?

Ghost stories. You probably already know this if you’ve read a few of my books, but I like them. Still, there’s one odd thing about them. Well, it isn’t surprising that a ghost story is unreasonable, but why do those stories tend to turn the victim into a monster and not the murderer? I’ve always found that weird, so while following a ghost story here, I also tried to make it a story about not simply treating a ghost like a monster.
It of course depends on the genre, but no matter what happens along the way, I want to write a protagonist that ultimately decides they want to save the ghost rather than fearing it.

And was this the first clear school life part of this series?
I had fun writing that while thinking how a summoner would live his school life when people forget about him the second they take their eyes off of him. Classmate, homeroom teacher, librarian, and student council president. … School characters tend to directly take their overall image from their “role”, don’t they? You need to put some distance between them and the role before fleshing them out.
But “I don’t want this to end as just a normal school story!!”, so I had them utterly destroy their school in just the one volume. That was a pretty big adventure as the one writing the story. I’ve written a few different series now, but I think this was my first time having the protagonist turn their school (a symbol of peace) into a pile of rubble.
Shiroyama Kyousuke smashed windows at his school at night while using cheap methods to save a girl who could not be saved. I think I’ve had him acting with more reckless abandon than in Volume 1, but what did you think?

For the Summoning Ceremony, I used the rose symbol and sigil from a certain magic cabal, but for the actual actions, I was using the extremely intuitive image that it would be fun to compete at bouncing a whole bunch of balls around a school or hospital. The Incense Grenade was added in for the intuitive image of wanting to walk on the walls or ceiling and wanting to fly through the sky. …Of course, it's really just the work I put in so I could avoid just having the summoners stand there doing nothing throughout the fight.
I went a step further this time and had the summoners themselves thrown like projectiles to further emphasize that intuitive sort of action. Did it seem more like a two-on-two fight?
I just hope you thought it sounded like a fun amusement park attraction even if you didn't quite understand it.
This was Volume 2 of Shiroyama Kyousuke going on a rampage, but I personally think the most frightening part of him is the ending when he said, "I would do whatever it took to take responsibility for every last thing my decision had changed."
I think that one line created a definite difference from my other series' protagonists who more optimistically say they just need a 1% chance of success if there's a girl they can save.
At first glance, Kyousuke seems to stand on the "guardian" side, but if the system won't save the person suffering before his eyes, he won't hesitate to destroy that system even if it's supporting seven billion people. He holds the "danger" of possibly reaching for that.
And he plans to make it all work whether he succeeds or fails, so he shows hints of being a monster himself as he faces the White Queen. …There's room for discussing which one is dragging the other around.

The special summoning this time used the "End of the World" theme from Urashima Tarou or Kaguya-hime. Unlike Kaguya-hime who came "here", it might be wrong to think of Urashima Tarou as a "summoning" since he went "there", but as the White Queen said in the novel, who gets to decide which side is "here" and which side is "there"? From that perspective, I think it is a form a summoning.
Due to the idea of moving freely between this world and the other world, that type of summoning commonly involves resurrection, immortality, and invincibility. (There are also stories of one's death or lifespan returning after breaking the rules.) If you have the time, it might be fun to look into all that.
And while Volume 1 included a ton of top-rank Divine and Unexplored-class Materials, I had all the fights this time stick to the Regulation-class except for the Leviathan at the beginning. That was due to the enemy using obstruction tactics, but while the previous volume was about worshiping the strongest, I was focusing more on the basics of summoners this time. That is, they were choosing the best Materials for their objective and even the

gods are just a rite of passage needed to reach even greater heights. Guard of Honor and an assassin use the paranormal in very different ways.
…Also, I felt the power creep would quickly get out of hand if I didn’t do this.

I give my thanks to my illustrator Ikawa Waki-san and my editors Miki-san, Onodera-san, and Anan-san. I think the Rainy Girl had to be the hardest part this time. She had to actually be her secret true identity and yet it couldn’t be too obvious at first glance, so she couldn’t have been easy to design. I am truly grateful.
It took place at school, he fought alongside a classmate, and a human life was on the line. I wanted to return to the starting point while also adding in some twisted elements I hadn’t used before, but what did you think? But setting aside the trickier parts, I hope you at least felt your blood pumping at the “This has to be what everyone really wanted to do!!” part.

And I will end this here.

It’s important to maintain that line where the White Queen is *dere* yet isn’t kind.
-Kamachi Kazuma

Mitou Shoukan://Blood-Sign — Volume 02

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